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BATMAN®

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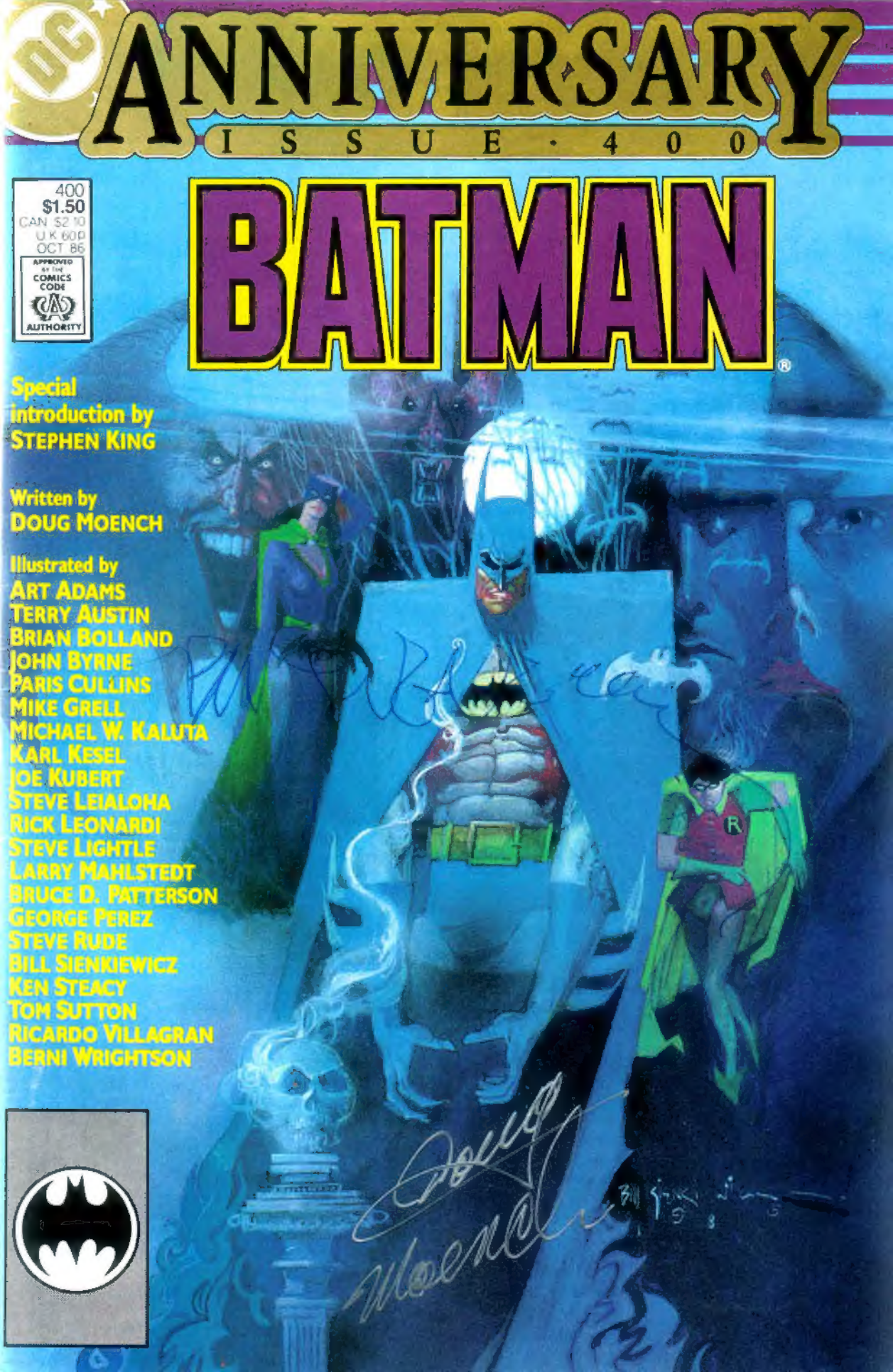

WHY I CHOSE BATMAN

BY
STEPHEN
KING

When I was a kid there were certain questions which came up and *had* to be answered…or at least *aired*, if finding a conclusive answer proved impossible.

One was whether or not you thought Don Larsen's World Series no-hitter was skill, fate, or just dumb luck.

Another concerned whatever was at the center of golf balls. I mean, we all knew what was under the pocky white surface: billions of rubber bands. But there was *something else* at the very center, some liquid that was believed by some to be the world's deadliest poison, by others a substance so corrosive it would almost immediately eat your fingers down to the bone, by still others a substance that would explode if you dripped it on hot pavement.

There was the question of why all the Disney characters wore gloves; of whether or not there even *was* such a thing as a complete set of the *green* Davy Crockett trading cards (the *red* ones were easy, but the green ones were weirdly scarce); if you would come out in China upside down if it was really possible to dig all the way through the earth to the other side.

These were questions asked and answered after you were too tired to swim out to the raft anymore and had crashed out on the beach, or when you were walking home from the baseball field in summer's sweet dusk with your feet burning inside your sneakers, or before you fell asleep on camp-outs.

And one of them was always this: Who do you like better, Superman or Batman?

I always chose Batman.

I guess some of my childhood friends don't really remember either the comic books or the question anymore, but I'm relieved to say that I never grew up completely, only grew more hair on various parts of my body and a sense of responsibility on my heart, and have friends who did the same: we love our wives and kids, do our jobs, but we also still read the comics. And I *still* choose Batman.

This is not to say I didn't dig Superman; let me reassure all of you out there howling for my blood (including the editors, writers, and inkers who would give their lives, their honor, and their sacred paychecks to protect the image and good name of the Man of Steel) that I dug him a lot. You couldn't *not* dig him because he was a good guy (and, contrary to the beliefs of some curmudgeons both then and now, kids feel a natural attraction for the good guys…thank God), because he had all those neat powers, because he had such a fetching array of foes to battle (including that little munchkin with the unpronounceable name—except we all used to pronounce it *Mixtaplik*—and to send him back into the fourth dimension you tricked him into saying *Kilpatzim*, or something like that), because he had such great friends (including Perry White, who was J. Jonah Jameson long before the Webslinger-to-Be had graduated from diapers to training pants).

But there was something about Superman that I always found a little…let me see. Not disappointing, that's not what I mean, but—wait, I got it. *Preordained*. He was too *strong* for me, too *capable*, maybe because I was a little kid who wore thick glasses, or maybe just because the concept of invulnerability made him seem to be a hero who had an unfair advantage (being good should always be harder than being bad). Take super-breath, for example. Is it fair to just be able to *blow* Metropolis back into place after Lex Luthor has sent it out into the Atlantic on nuclear-power jets? Maybe, but me, I had some trouble with the concept. He had his Achilles' heel, of course, but it was (at least until editors began to confuse the issue with red Kryptonite, yellow Kryptonite, and for all I know pistachio Kryptonite) a very small one.

Batman, however, was just a guy.

A *rich* guy, yes.

A *strong* guy, granted.

A *smart* guy, you bet.

But…he couldn't *fly*.

I think that formed my preference more than anything else. I remember the ads for the first Superman movie (remember the *first* Superman movie, gang? Back there when the world was young and dinosaurs walked the earth?), the ones that said YOU'LL BELIEVE A MAN CAN FLY. Well, I didn't. Not in the movie and not completely in the comic books (ironically, the closest I ever came to believing it was in the TV series). But when Batman swung down into The Joker's hideout on a rope or stopped The Penguin from dropping Robin into a bucket of boiling hog-fat with a well-thrown Batarang, I *believed*. These were not *likely* things, I freely grant you that, but they were *possible* things. I could believe in a Caped Crusader who swung on ropes, threw boomerangs with deadly accuracy, and drove like Richard Petty getting a pregnant woman to the hospital.

Super-breath was hard to believe in, but a guy

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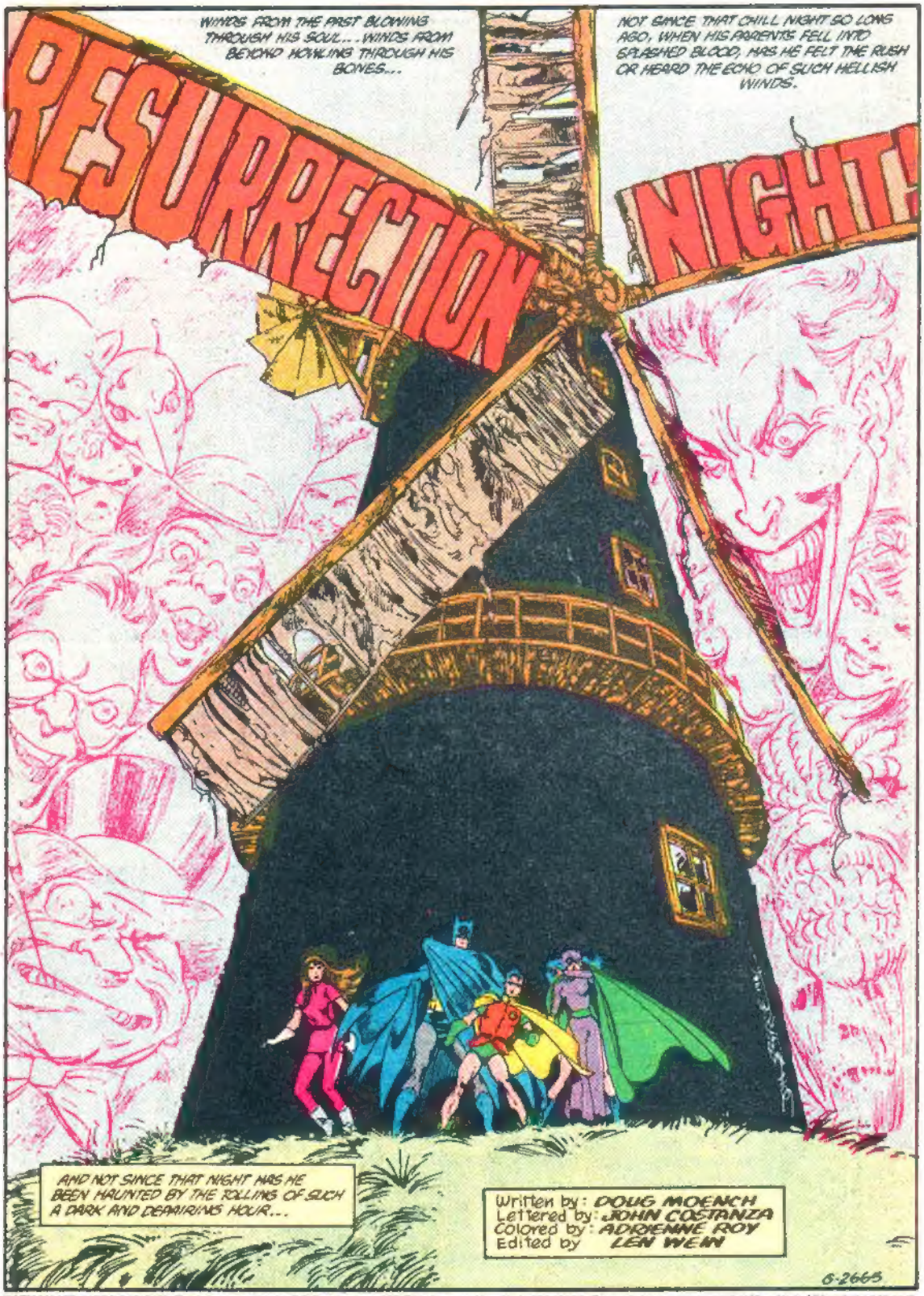
WINDS FROM THE PAST BLOWING THROUGH HIS SOUL... WINDS FROM BEYOND HOWLING THROUGH HIS BONES...
NOT SINCE THAT CHILL NIGHT SO LONG AGO, WHEN HIS PARENTS FELL INTO SPLASHED BLOOD, HAS HE FELT THE RUSH OR HEARD THE ECHO OF SUCH HELLISH WINDS.
RESURRECTION
NIGHT!
AND NOT SINCE THAT NIGHT HAS HE BEEN HAUNTED BY THE ROLLING OF SUCH A DARK AND DESPAIRING HOUR...
Written by: DOUG MOENCH
Lettered by: JOHN COSTANZA
Colored by: ADRIENNE ROY
Edited by LEN WEIN
6-2663

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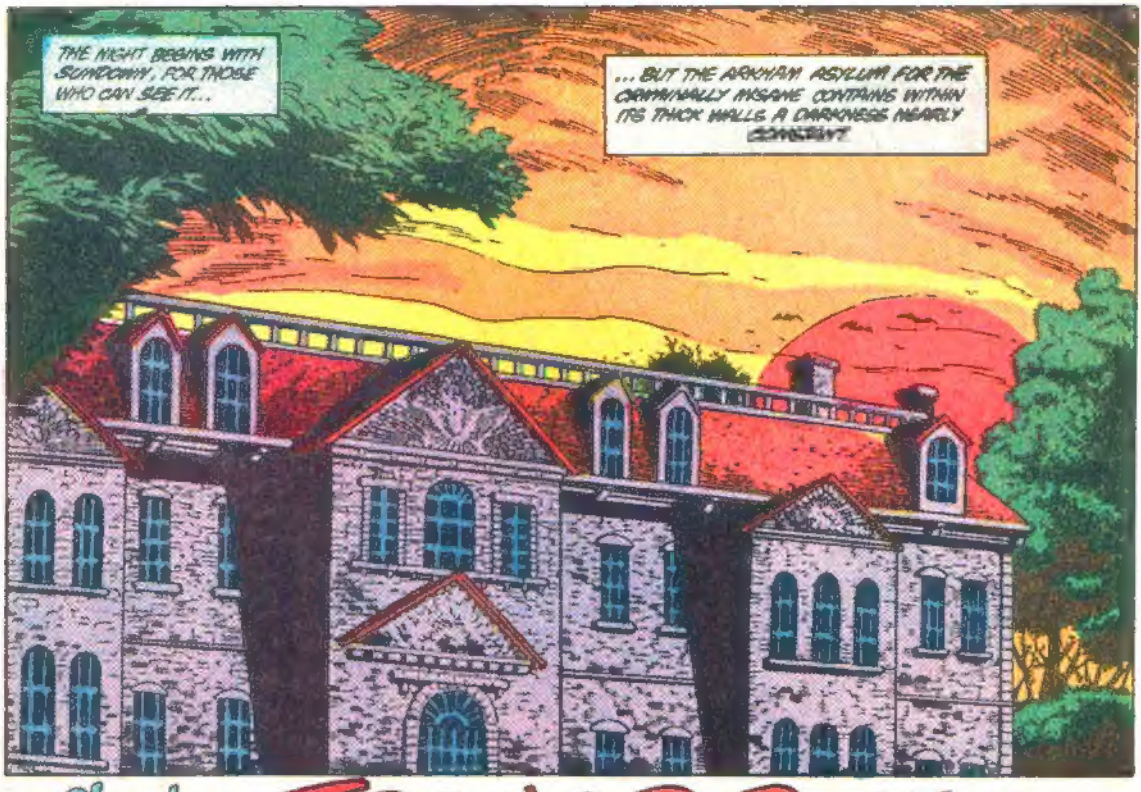
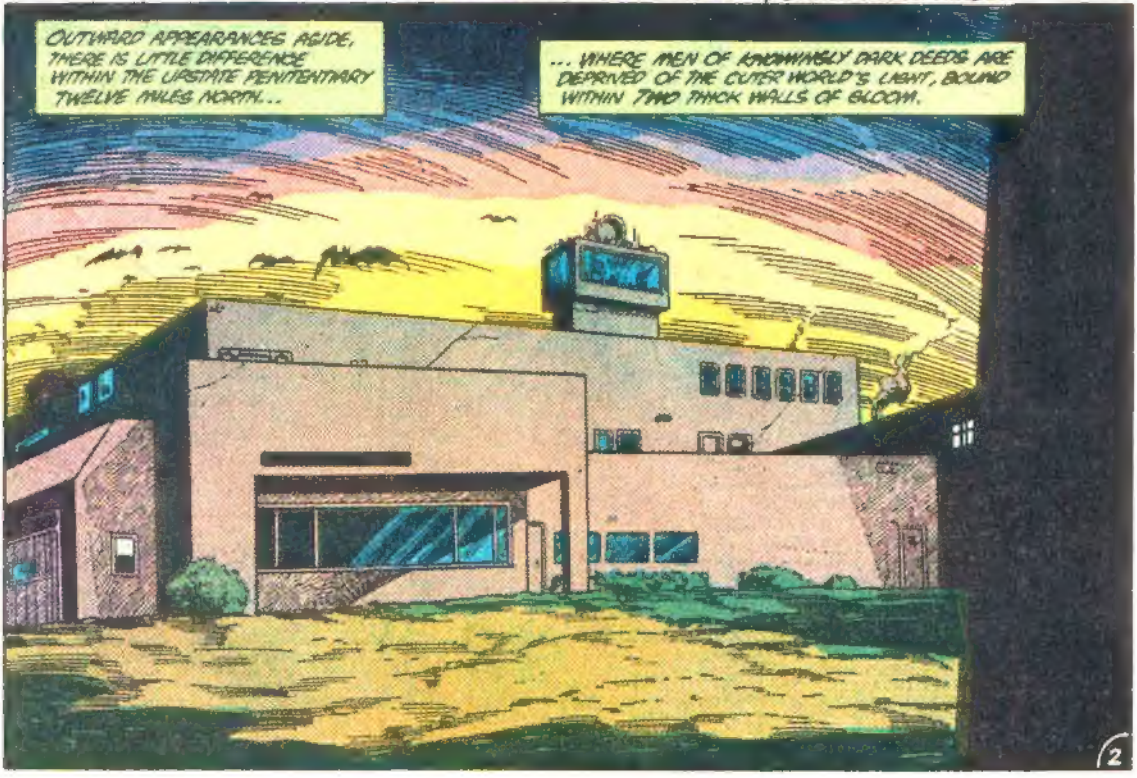
Adrienne Roy Colorfully yours!


THE NIGHT BEGINS WITH SUNDOWN, FOR THOSE WHO CAN SEE IT...
...BUT THE ARKHAM ASYLUM FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE CONTAINS WITHIN ITS THICK WALLS A DARKNESS NEARLY CONSTANT.

Chapter I TRADING DARKNESS

ILLUSTRATED BY: STEVE LIGHTLE & BRUCE D. PATTERSON

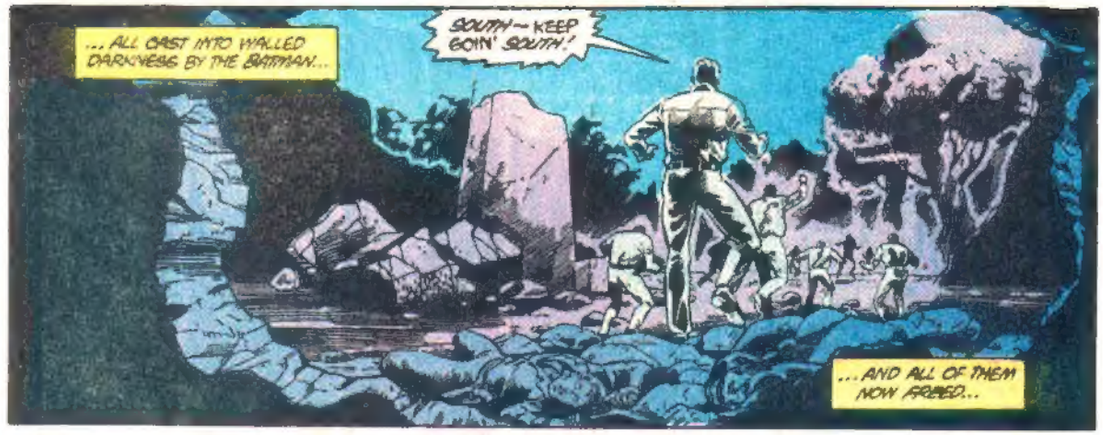

OUTWARD APPEARANCES ASIDE, THERE IS LITTLE DIFFERENCE WITHIN THE UPSTATE PENITENTIARY TWELVE MILES NORTH...
...WHERE MEN OF KNOWINGLY DARK DEEDS ARE DEPRIVED OF THE OUTER WORLD'S LIGHT, BOUND WITHIN TWO THICK WALLS OF GLOOM.

AS SHADOWS LENGTHEN ON THIS NIGHT AND OTHERS, ARKHAM OFTEN RESOUNDS WITH A LAUGHTER TO CHILL RATHER THAN CHEER.
JOKER
AT TIMES, FOR EXAMPLE, THE JOKER ACTUALLY LIKES IT HERE.
HAHAHAHAH
YET THERE ARE OTHERS, WHISPERING TO NO ONE, WHO SEEM TO CARE NEITHER WAY.
HIS FACE NOW PERMANENTLY MASKED BY SCARS, BLACK MASK IS ONE SUCH...
JANUS...
THEN THERE ARE THOSE INMATES WHO SEEM TO RIDE ALTERNATING CYCLES OF CATATONIC STUPOR AND SHRIEKING FRENZY.
WOO WOOO YEEEEEE
TONIGHT, FOR SOME REASON, THE MAD HATTER PREFERS THE LATTER.
SOME, LIKE THE GROTESQUE KILLER CROC, ADOPT PATTERNS OF SUPREMELY MINDLESS DISCIPLINE...
...NINETY-EIGHT... NINETY-NINE...
CLAYFACE, HOWEVER, NEVER SEEMS TO MOVE AT ALL.
HE SIMPLY STARES AT THE WALL... AND THE WET, RED FANTASIES IN HIS EYES, IF SHARED, WOULD PROMPT ANY SANE MAN TO BEHEAD HIM ON THE SPOT.
AND THERE ARE OTHERS, SO MANY OTHERS OF SUCH SICK AND TWISTED EVIL--
-- THAT THIS BLEAK PLACE, AND EVERY ATOM OF STONE IN ITS WALLS, MUST SURELY BE CURSED TO CONTAIN THEM ALL.
3

AND IF THE GLOOM WITHIN THE STATE PEN'S MAXIMUM SECURITY CELLBLOCK IS NO DIFFERENT FROM ARKHAM, THE SHADING OF ITS INMATES OFTEN IS.
THE RIDDLER, FOR EXAMPLE, IS PLAINLY DISGUSTED...
140
101 RIDDLES
NOT A GOOD ONE IN THE WHOLE BOOK-- AND WHEN IS IT GOING TO HAPPEN?
THE CAVALIER, SEEMINGLY LOST IN TIME WITHOUT HIS SWASHBUCKLING ATTIRE, IS ALMOST CASUALLY RESTLESS...
SO MUCH TO DO.. BUT I WONDER IF I SHOULD GO ALONG WITH IT...?
481
CONVINCED HE IS POSSESSED OF NINE LIVES, THE CATMAN IS QUITE SIMPLY BORED.
WELL... AT LEAST I'LL BE ABLE TO GET BACK INTO COSTUME...
CATWOMAN
IN THE WOMEN'S WING, POISON IVY IS NEARLY INSISTENT...
EVEN IF HIS ULTIMATE PLAN IS UNWORTHY OF CULTIVATION, AT LEAST IT'LL BE NICE TO SEE GREEN THINGS GROWING AGAIN...
THE BIZARRELY DIMINUTIVE PENGUIN, ALMOST A CARTOON OF A MAN, CAN BARELY RESTRAIN SQUAWKS OF OUTRIGHT GLEE...
I CAN'T WAIT... I JUST CAN'T WAIT!
459
... WHILE AMONG THE OTHERS -- CALENDER MAN, CRAZY-QUILT, BLACK SPIDER, DAGGER, DEADSHOT, AND SO MANY MORE -- EMOTIONS RANGE FROM IMPATIENCE TO ZEAL, ENCOMPASSING BUT ONE COMMON FACTOR...
HATRED, SEETHING... WAITING TO EXPLODE.
4

AND THEN, CLOSELY TIMED, IT HAPPENS.
THE NIGHT IS LIT BY HALF OF ARKHAM FLYING IN FIRE...
KAWHOOM!
THREE SECONDS LATER, THE STATE PRISON IS RIPPED BY TWO EXPLOSIONS IN RAPID SUCCESSION...
...SIGNALING THE NIGHT'S LONG JOURNEY INTO HELL.
WHOOM!
WAWHOOMM
WHILE, IN THE BATCAVE...
LOOKS LIKE THIS'LL BE THE SECOND NIGHT RUINED BY THAT LOUSY NOTE -- AND OF ALL NIGHTS TO BE WASTED...
BUT WHAT CAN THE MESSAGE MEAN, BATMAN?
IN GOD WE TRUST
IT'S A WARNING, ROBIN...
KNOW YOUR FOES!
BUT WHICH FOES IS IT WARNING ME AGAINST...?
6

ALL OF THEM.
TO THE NORTH! KEEP RUNNING TO THE NORTH!
ALL BANISHED FROM THE LIGHT BY ONE MAN...


...ALL CAST INTO WALLED DARKNESS BY THE BATMAN...
SOUTH--KEEP GOIN' SOUTH!
...AND ALL OF THEM NOW FREED...

...FREE TO RUN FOR ONE MAD HOUR THROUGH REAL DARKNESS...
THERE'S THE FLARE--RIGHT ON SCHEDULE!
AND HERE ARE OUR COSTUMES--ALL OF THEM--JUST AS HE PROMISED!

YEAH--IF THIS GUY'S PLAN IS TIMED LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE SO FAR, TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT OUR COMMON FOE KISSES HIS CAREER GOOD-BYE.
...FREE ON THIS, THE ANNIVERSARY OF THAT NIGHT WHEN ONE MAN FIRST DONNED THE CLOAK OF A BAT... AND BECAME THE TARGET OF SO MANY OTHERS WRAPPED IN CLOAKS OF MADNESS AND EVIL.

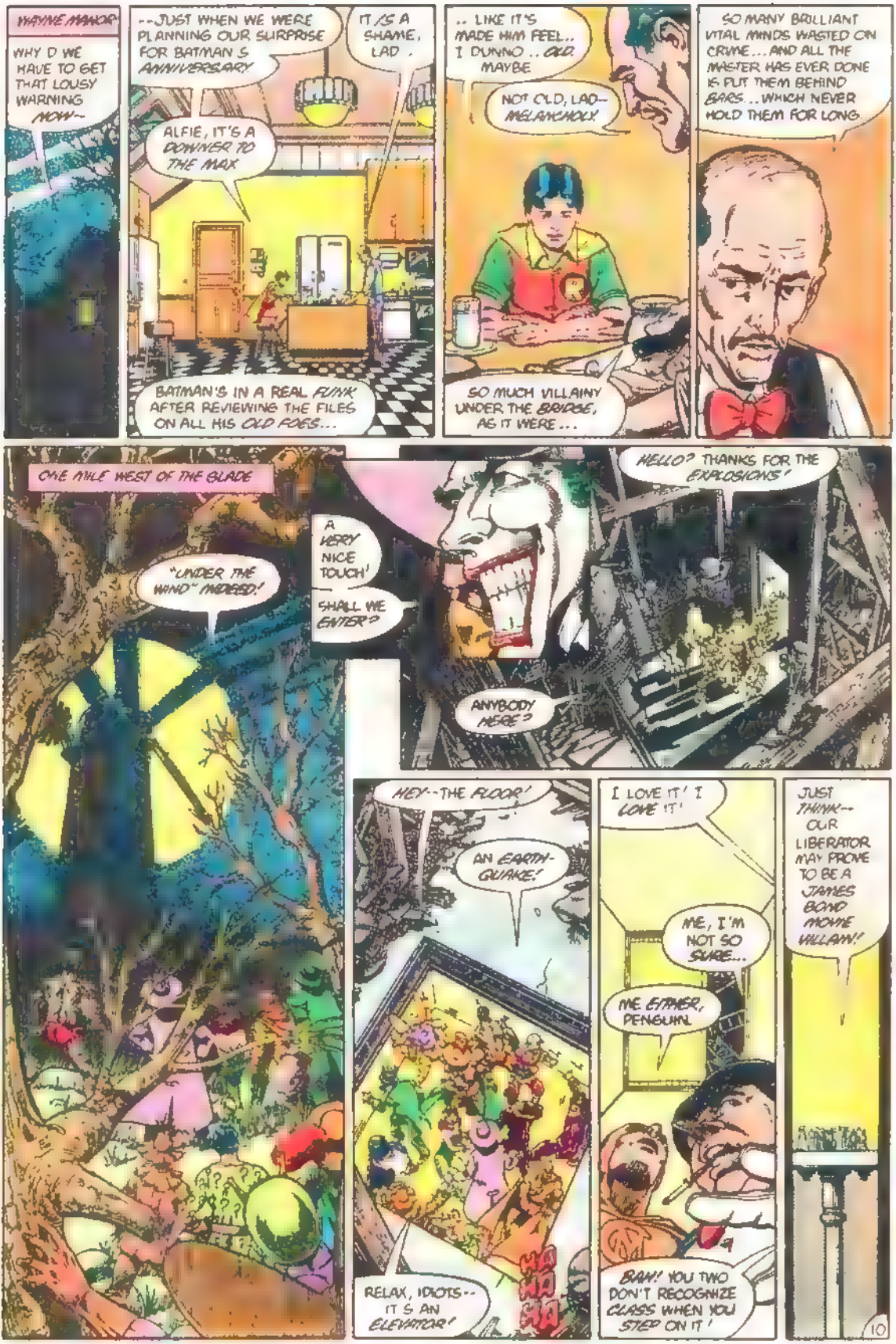
THE BATCAVE:
WHICH FOES, INDEED?
AND MOREOVER... WHO SENT THE WARNING?
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BOSS--
--BUT MY SKULL IS TIRED OF BEING AN ECHO CHAMBER FOR THOSE TWO QUESTIONS...
I'LL BE UP IN THE MANOR--
--COPPIN' SOME OF ALFIE'S SANDWICHES.
NOT JUST TWO QUESTIONS, BUT THREE...
WHICH FOES SHOULD I "KNOW"?
WHO SAYS SO?
KNOW YOUR FOES
AND WHY?
WHILE, EVEN IN THE GLADE HALFWAY BETWEEN ARKHAM AND THE STATE PEN, ONLY THE FIRST QUESTION IS ANSWERED-- ALBEIT IN SPECTACULAR FASHION.
STOW IT, JOKER! WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHO'S BEHIND ALL THIS, BUT ACCORDING TO THE IDENTICAL MESSAGE HE SMUGGLED INTO EACH OF OUR CELLS, THE NEXT STEP IS TO MEET HIM--"UNDER THE WIND ONE MILE WEST."
HAHAH! FEELS GOOD TO BE DRESSED AGAIN, DOES IT NOT?
FORGET IT-- I TAKE ORDERS FROM NOBODY.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE TO CONSIDER: WHATEVER PLANS OUR UNKNOWN BENEFACTOR HAS FOR US, THEY'RE CERTAIN TO INVOLVE THE BATMAN--AND SINCE I JUST TANGLED WITH HIM, I'M HARDLY READY FOR A RETURN MATCH.
8

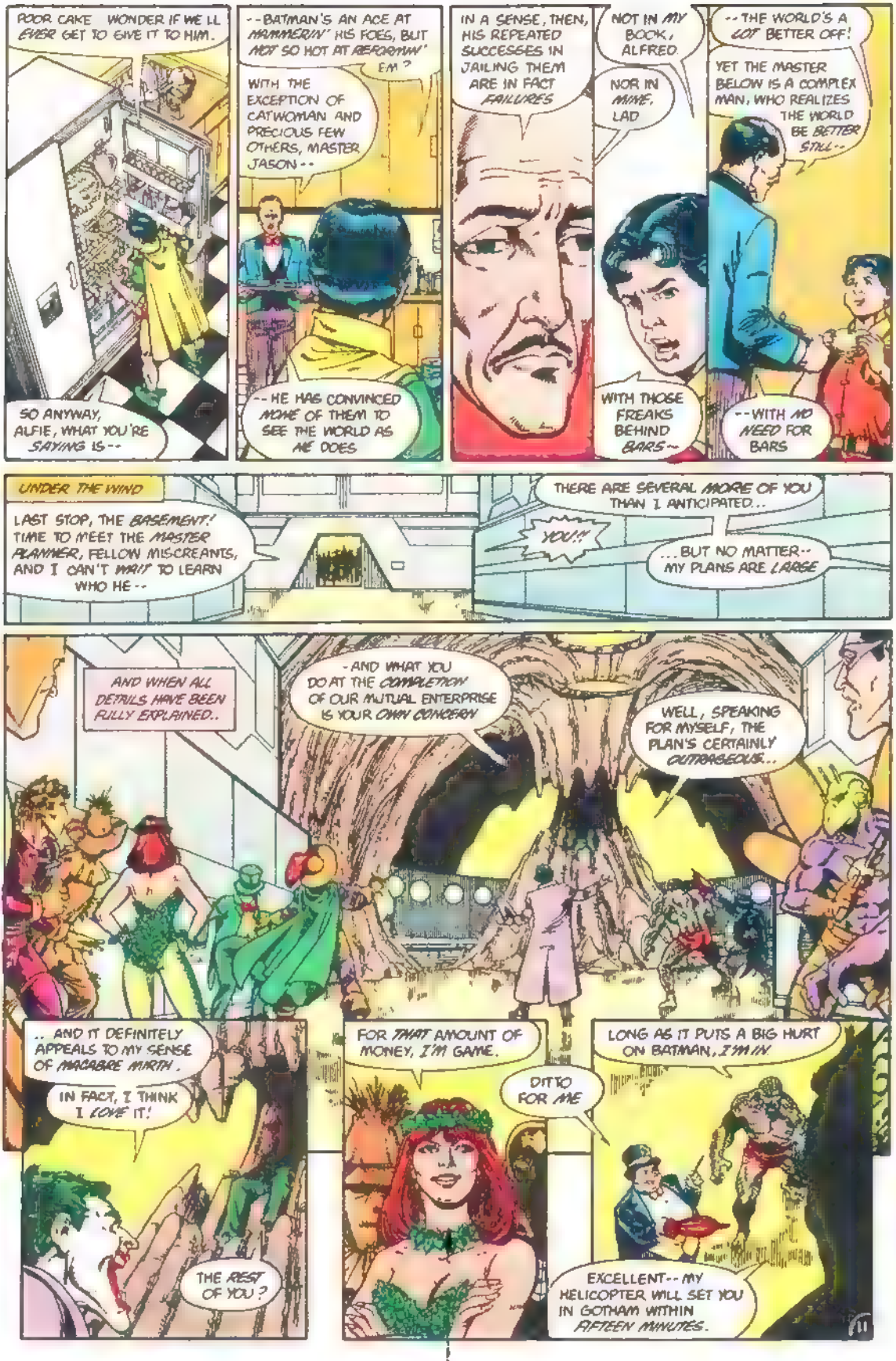
CHAPTER II

THE MASTER BELOW

ILLUSTRATED BY: GEORGE PÉREZ

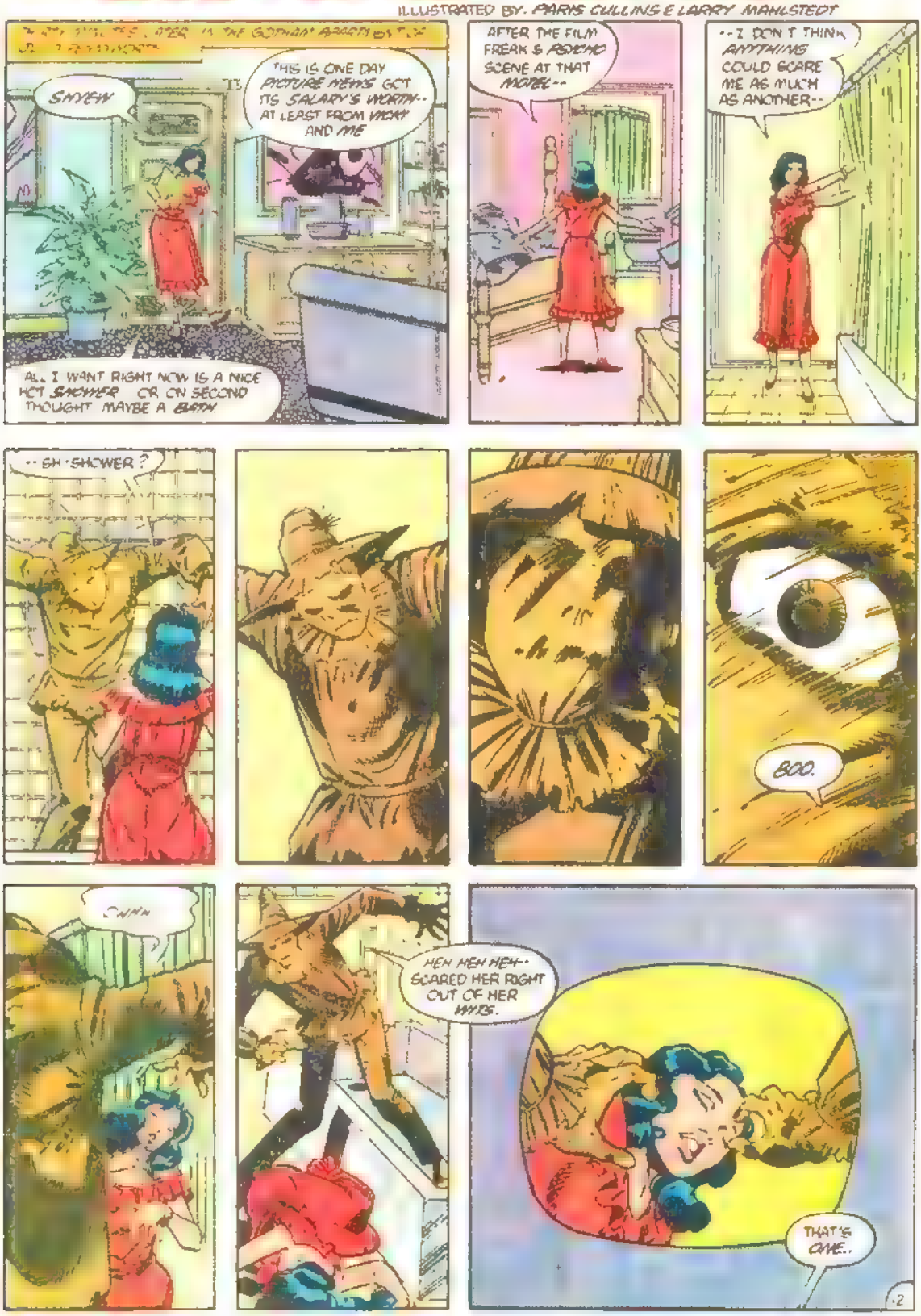
COME, COME, YOU TWO!
WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF THE ABSURD--IF NOT OF ADVENTURE?
THE NEXT STEP HOLDS ALL THE FUN OF OUR MASSED ESCAPE--FINDING OUT WHO ENGINEERED IT.
I CARE ABOUT NOTHING BUT NOCTURNA...
...ABOUT FINDING HER, SOMEWHERE IN THE NIGHT...
...AND SLAYING HER.
YEAH--AFTER BEIN' BEHIND BARS SO LONG, A LOT OF US GOT PLANS OF OUR OWN... OTHER THAN CHASIN' THE WIND.
AMEN! NOW THAT I'M FREE, I'M GONNA STAY THAT WAY!
COUNT ME OUT, TOO!
HOW ABOUT YOU, TWO-FACE? WANT TO LEAVE WITH US?
FLIP
HMMM...
THE ANSWER IS YES, MR. FREEZE.
FOR NOW, ANYWAY.
WELL, MY FINE FELLOW FIENDS, I GUESS WE'RE THE ONLY GRATEFUL ONES...
...OR THE ONLY ONES UNAFRAID TO FACE BATS AGAIN, SO WHY DON'T WE--
SHUT UP, JOKER!
YOU TALK TOO MUCH--AND GABBLE MORE.
NOW LET'S FIND THE GUY WHO FREED US AND HEAR WHAT'S ON HIS MIND.
OOOPH!
YOUR ALACRITY IS INSPIRING, KILLER CROC!
GET IT STRAIGHT--I'M DOIN' THIS FOR ONE REASON ONLY...
TO BREAK THE BATMAN'S BACK.
9


WAYNE MANOR
WHY D WE HAVE TO GET THAT LOUSY WARNING NOW--
--JUST WHEN WE WERE PLANNING OUR SURPRISE FOR BATMAN'S ANNIVERSARY
IT IS A SHAME, LAD.
ALFIE, IT'S A DOWNER TO THE MAX
BATMAN'S IN A REAL FUNK AFTER REVIEWING THE FILES ON ALL HIS OLD FOES...
.. LIKE IT'S MADE HIM FEEL.. I DUNNO .. OLD. MAYBE
NOT OLD, LAD-- MELANCHOLY
SO MUCH VILLAINY UNDER THE BRIDGE, AS IT WERE...
SO MANY BRILLIANT VITAL MINDS WASTED ON CRIME... AND ALL THE MASTER HAS EVER DONE IS PUT THEM BEHIND BARS... WHICH NEVER HOLD THEM FOR LONG.
ONE MILE WEST OF THE GLADE
"UNDER THE WIND" INDEED!
A VERY NICE TOUCH!
SHALL WE ENTER?
HELLO? THANKS FOR THE EXPLOSIONS!
ANYBODY HERE?
HEY--THE FLOOR!
AN EARTH-QUAKE!
RELAX, IDIOTS-- IT'S AN ELEVATOR!
HA HA HA
I LOVE IT! I LOVE IT!
ME, I'M NOT SO SURE...
ME EITHER, PENGUIN.
BAH! YOU TWO DON'T RECOGNIZE CLASS WHEN YOU STEP ON IT!
JUST THINK-- OUR LIBERATOR MAY PROVE TO BE A JAMES BOND MOVIE VILLAIN!
10


POOR CAKE WONDER IF WE'LL EVER GET TO GIVE IT TO HIM.
SO ANYWAY, ALFIE, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS--
--BATMAN'S AN ACE AT HAMMERIN' HIS FOES, BUT NOT SO HOT AT REFORMIN' 'EM?
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CATWOMAN AND PRECIOUS FEW OTHERS, MASTER JASON--
--HE HAS CONVINCED NONE OF THEM TO SEE THE WORLD AS HE DOES
IN A SENSE, THEN, HIS REPEATED SUCCESSES IN JAILING THEM ARE IN FACT FAILURES
NOT IN MY BOOK, ALFRED.
NOR IN MINE, LAD
WITH THOSE FREAKS BEHIND BARS--
--THE WORLD'S A LOT BETTER OFF!
YET THE MASTER BELOW IS A COMPLEX MAN, WHO REALIZES THE WORLD BE BETTER STILL--
--WITH NO NEED FOR BARS
UNDER THE WIND
LAST STOP, THE BASEMENT! TIME TO MEET THE MASTER PLANNER, FELLOW MISCREANTS, AND I CAN'T WAIT TO LEARN WHO HE--
THERE ARE SEVERAL MORE OF YOU THAN I ANTICIPATED..
YOU!!
...BUT NO MATTER-- MY PLANS ARE LARGE
AND WHEN ALL DETAILS HAVE BEEN FULLY EXPLAINED..
-AND WHAT YOU DO AT THE COMPLETION OF OUR MUTUAL ENTERPRISE IS YOUR OWN CONCERN
WELL, SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, THE PLAN'S CERTAINLY OUTRAGEOUS..
.. AND IT DEFINITELY APPEALS TO MY SENSE OF MACABRE MIRTH.
IN FACT, I THINK I LOVE IT!
THE REST OF YOU?
FOR THAT AMOUNT OF MONEY, I'M GAME.
DITTO FOR ME
LONG AS IT PUTS A BIG HURT ON BATMAN, I'M IN.
EXCELLENT-- MY HELICOPTER WILL SET YOU IN GOTHAM WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES.

CHAPTER III FIRST STEPS

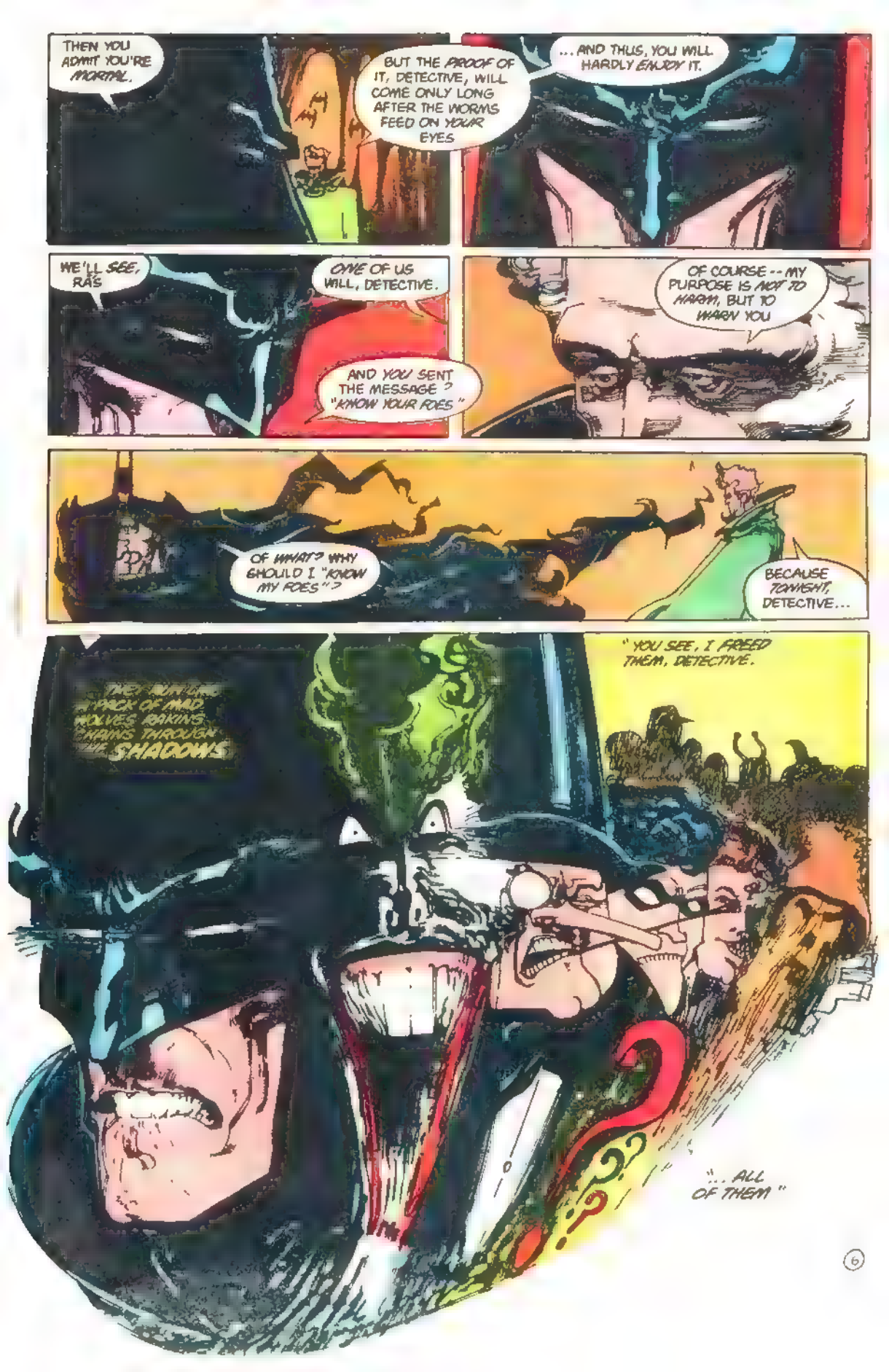
ILLUSTRATED BY: PARIS CULLINS & LARRY MAHLSTEDT

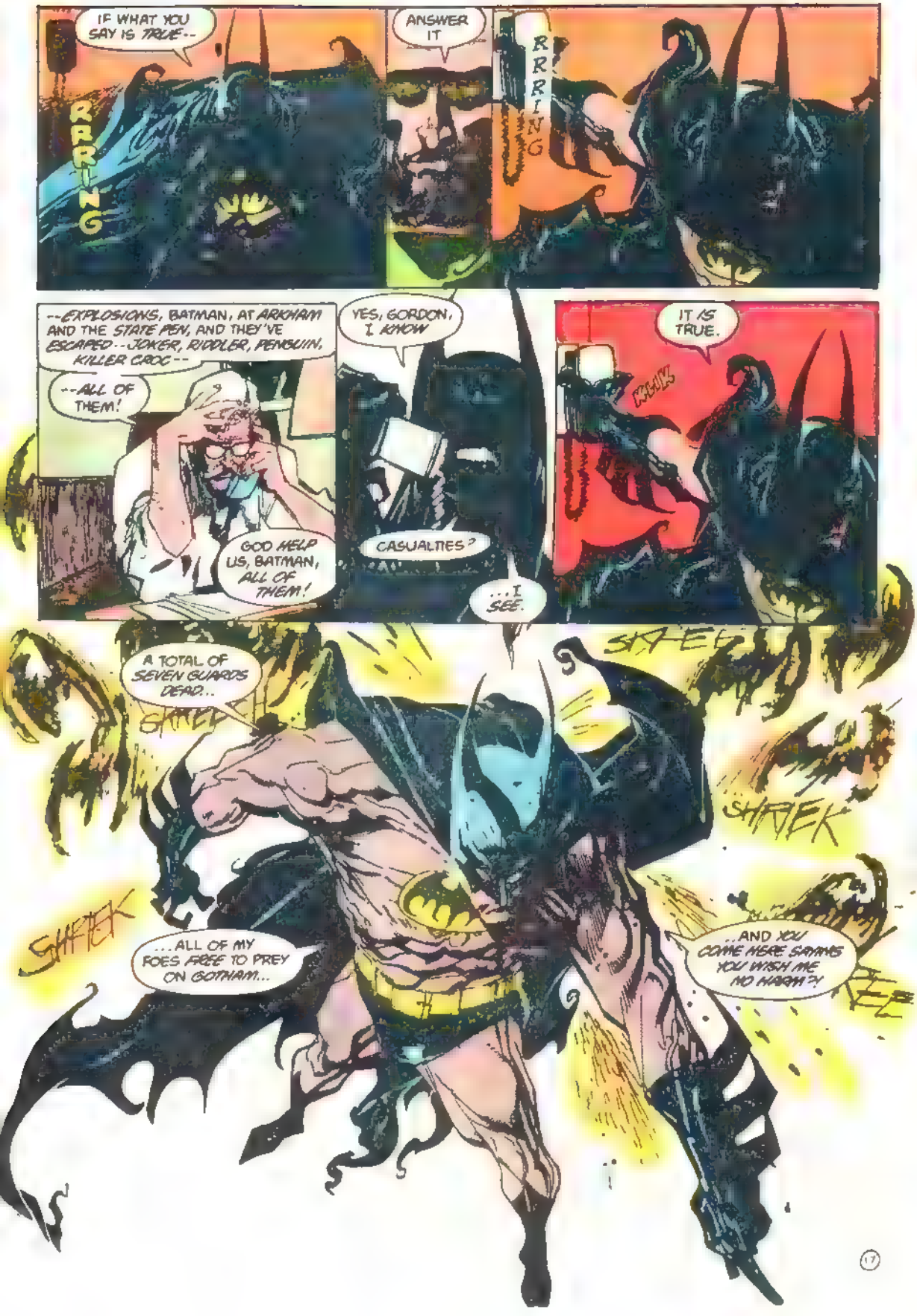

SHYEW
THIS IS ONE DAY PICTURE NEWS GOT ITS SALARY'S WORTH-- AT LEAST FROM WEAK AND ME
ALL I WANT RIGHT NOW IS A NICE HOT SHOWER OR ON SECOND THOUGHT MAYBE A BATH.
AFTER THE FILM FREAK & ADDAMS SCENE AT THAT MOVIE--
--I DON'T THINK ANYTHING COULD SCARE ME AS MUCH AS ANOTHER--
--SH-SHOWER?
BOO.
CHHH
HEH HEH HEH-- SCARED HER RIGHT OUT OF HER WITS.
THAT'S ONE..
-2-

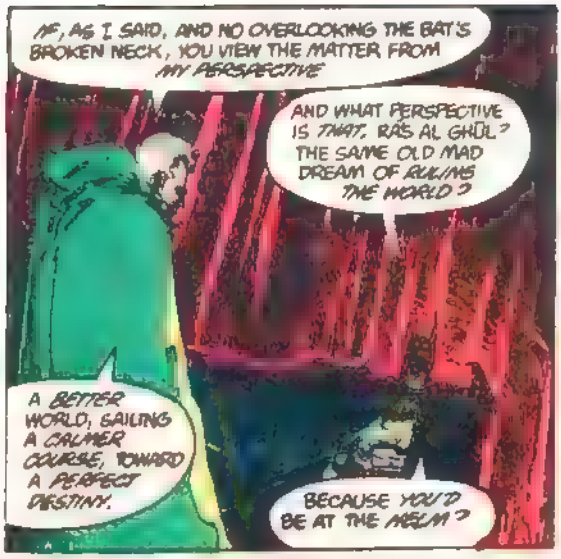
AND, ACROSS THE BAY, HARVEY BULLOCK & SGT. RENTARO HOME
WHATTA DAY--ARKHAM AN THE STATE PEN BOTH BLOWIN UP ALMOST AT THE SAME TIME.
WHICH MEANS THERE'S A LOT O WORSE DAYS AHEAD, AND--
WHAT'T THE--!
WHERE'D THIS WEIRD PLANT COME FROM?!
CREEPY THING, TOO.
ALMOST LIKE INVASION OF THE BODY SNA--
ACH-H!
: KOFF KOFF :
POUF!
DON'T KNOW WHY OUR NEW LEADER WANTS A FAT COP LIKE YOU--
P-POISON IVY!
-- BUT SINCE HE'S DONE WELL BY US THUS FAR--
MY G-GUN GOTTA USE MY G--
THWIP
--UHHHH
--I'M WILLING TO FOLLOW HIS ORDERS TO THE END
...TWO...
3

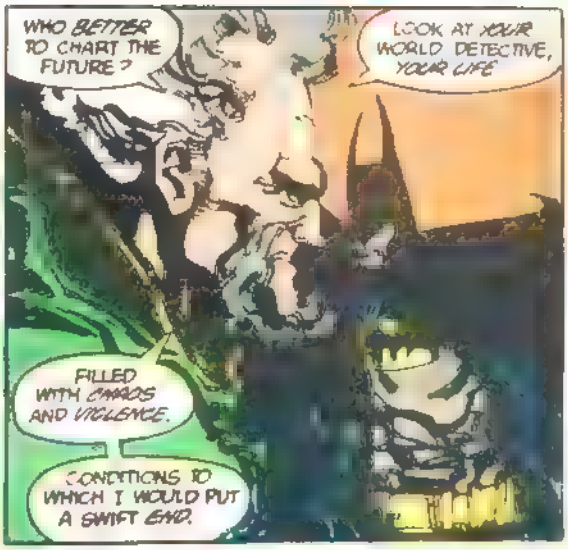
VICKI VALE'S PENTHOUSE!
BING BONG!
ODD HOW THE BEST REMEDY FOR AN EXHAUSTING DAY IS A HARD WORKOUT. BUT--
EH? THE DOOR...
MUST BE JIM TARAYMOR..
...WHO MAY BE NO BRUCE WAYNE, BUT AT LEAST HE'S ATTENTIVE.
HUH? NO ONE IN THE HALL--JUST A NOTE TAPED TO THE DOOR..
RIDDLE ME THIS: WHY DID THE DOORBELL REFUSE TO BE SILENT?
WHAT THE--?
AHN-N!
KONK!
BECAUSE IT'S NOT A DUMB-BELL!
HAHAH!
ALL RIGHT, KNOCK OFF THE LOUSY RIDDLES AND LET'S GET THIS MUSCLE-WOMAN TO THE GREENHOUSE.
SPOILSPORT
. AND THREE.
FIRST STEPS COMPLETED--THE MASTER'S PLAN PROCEEDS.
14

FWUFWUFWUFWUFWUF
KNOW YOUR FOES
SKREEK
SNAP!
PLUD
WHAT THE—?
CALL IT AN OMEN, DETECTIVE...
..SHOULD YOU FAIL TO SEE THIS MATTER FROM ANY PERSPECTIVE
CLERK'S TEMPING
RÄS AL GHUL!
BUT YOU'RE... DEAD.
THOSE WERE NOT MY ASHES YOU SAW DRIFTING FROM THE SPACECRAFT WHEN I LAST DIED, DETECTIVE, BUT I WAS FORCED TO UNDERGO PROCESSES EVEN MORE REMARKABLE THAN MERE IMMERSION IN THE LAZARUS PIT.
IN GOD WE TRUST
AND MY PHYSICIANS INFORM ME THAT EACH SUCH ADDITIONAL RESURRECTION BRINGS ME CLOSER TO THAT INEVITABLE DAY WHEN THE LAZARUS PIT SHALL FAIL...
..CLOSER TO THAT ONE DEATH WHICH CANNOT BE REVERSED
15

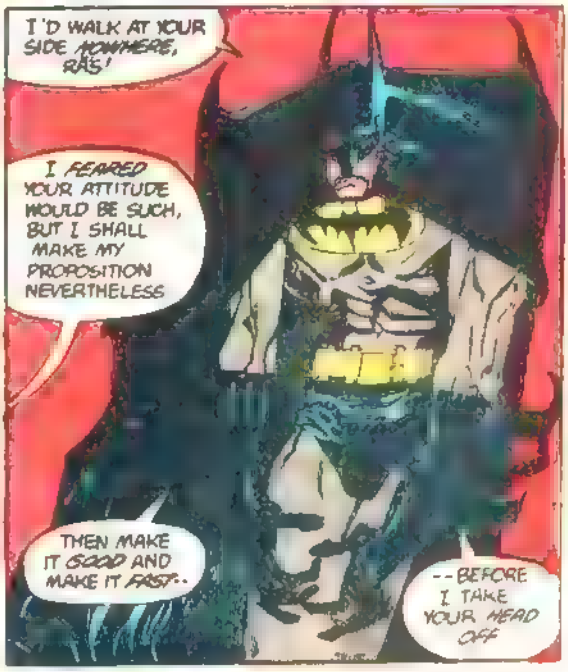

THEN YOU ADMIT YOU'RE MORTAL.
BUT THE PROOF OF IT, DETECTIVE, WILL COME ONLY LONG AFTER THE WORMS FEED ON YOUR EYES
... AND THUS, YOU WILL HARDLY ENJOY IT.
WE'LL SEE, RAS
ONE OF US WILL, DETECTIVE.
AND YOU SENT THE MESSAGE? "KNOW YOUR FOES"
OF COURSE -- MY PURPOSE IS NOT TO HARM, BUT TO WARN YOU
OF WHAT? WHY SHOULD I "KNOW MY FOES"?
BECAUSE TONIGHT, DETECTIVE...
THEY RUN LIKE A PACK OF MAD WOLVES RAKING THROUGH THE SHADOWS
"YOU SEE, I FREED THEM, DETECTIVE.
"... ALL OF THEM"


IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE--
RRRING
ANSWER IT
RRRING
--EXPLOSIONS, BATMAN, AT ARKHAM AND THE STATE PEN, AND THEY'VE ESCAPED--JOKER, RIDDLER, PENGUIN, KILLER CROC--
--ALL OF THEM!
GOD HELP US, BATMAN, ALL OF THEM!
YES, GORDON, I KNOW
CASUALTIES?
...I SEE.
IT IS TRUE.
KLIK
A TOTAL OF SEVEN GUARDS DEAD...
SKRED
SKRED
SHREK
SHREK
...ALL OF MY FOES FREE TO PREY ON GOTHAM...
...AND YOU COME HERE SAYING YOU WISH ME NO HARM?!
17

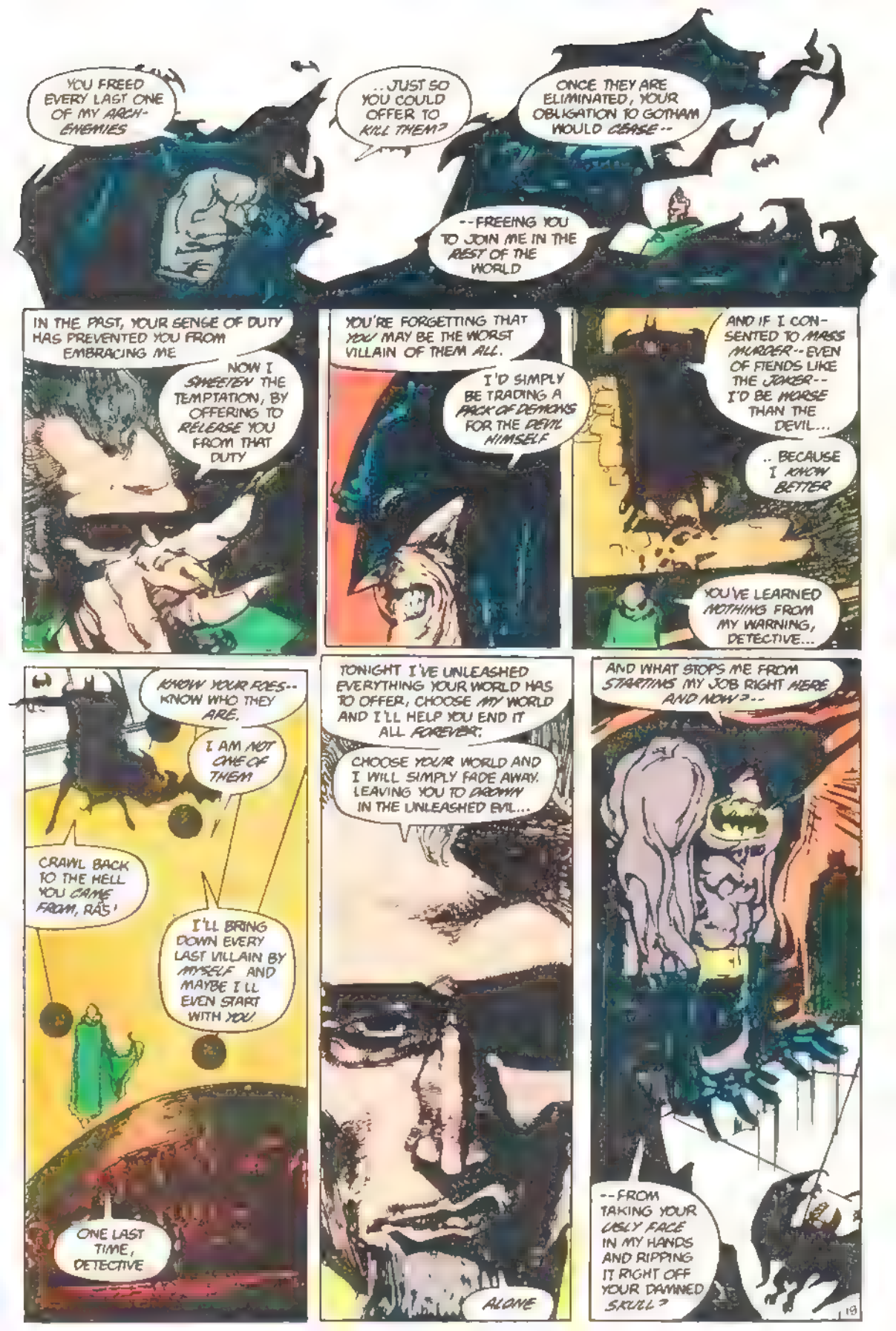

IF, AS I SAID, AND NO OVERLOOKING THE BAT'S BROKEN NECK, YOU VIEW THE MATTER FROM MY PERSPECTIVE
AND WHAT PERSPECTIVE IS THAT, RAS AL GHUL? THE SAME OLD MAD DREAM OF RULING THE WORLD?
A BETTER WORLD, SAILING A CALMER COURSE, TOWARD A PERFECT DESTINY.
BECAUSE YOU'D BE AT THE HELM?


WHO BETTER TO CHART THE FUTURE?
LOOK AT YOUR WORLD DETECTIVE, YOUR LIFE
FILLED WITH CHAOS AND VIOLENCE.
CONDITIONS TO WHICH I WOULD PUT A SWIFT END.

YES! BY TRAMMELING THE SPIRITS OF EVERYONE ALIVE -- THE GOOD RIGHT ALONG WITH THE BAD!
PERHAPS.. AND PERHAPS SUCH IS THE PRICE OF HARMONY
HARMONY OF THE OPPRESSED -- OF ZOMBIES -- OF SPIRITS BROKEN AND CAGED IN A MADMAN'S FANTASY!
WOULD YOU RATHER WALK AT MY SIDE THROUGH THE WILD JUNGLE OR AN ORDERLY ZOO?


I'D WALK AT YOUR SIDE ANYWHERE, RAS!
I FEARED YOUR ATTITUDE WOULD BE SUCH, BUT I SHALL MAKE MY PROPOSITION NEVERTHELESS
THEN MAKE IT GOOD AND MAKE IT FAST..
-- BEFORE I TAKE YOUR HEAD OFF

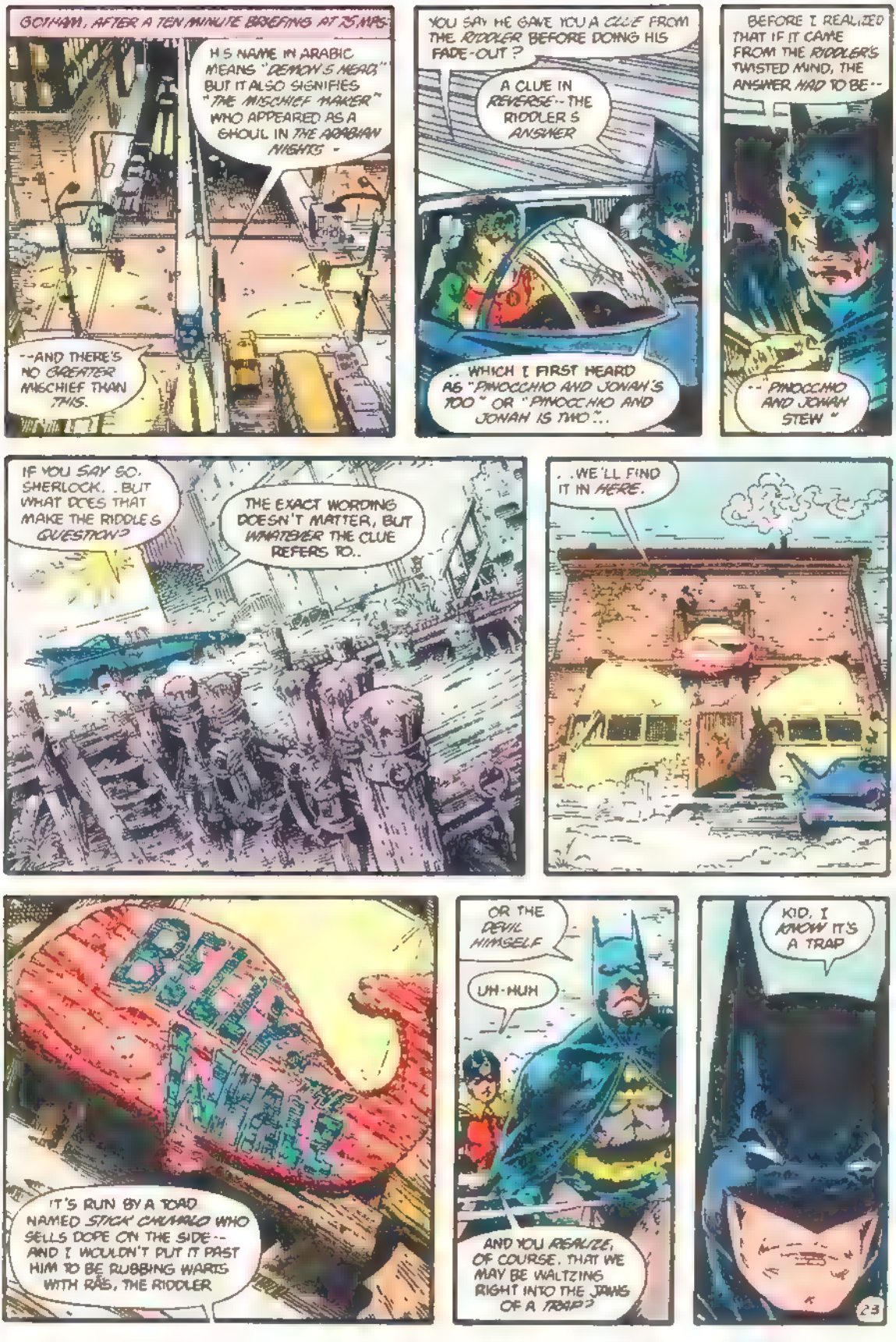
IT IS SIMPLE.
JOIN ME IN RESHAPING THE WORLD, DETECTIVE, AND I WILL HELP YOU RECAPTURE YOUR FOES
.OR, SHOULD YOU PREFER, EVEN ELIMINATE THEM FOREVER


YOU FREED EVERY LAST ONE OF MY ARCH-ENEMIES
..JUST SO YOU COULD OFFER TO KILL THEM?
ONCE THEY ARE ELIMINATED, YOUR OBLIGATION TO GOTHAM WOULD CEASE--
--FREEING YOU TO JOIN ME IN THE REST OF THE WORLD
IN THE PAST, YOUR SENSE OF DUTY HAS PREVENTED YOU FROM EMBRACING ME
NOW I SWEETEN THE TEMPTATION, BY OFFERING TO RELEASE YOU FROM THAT DUTY
YOU'RE FORGETTING THAT YOU MAY BE THE WORST VILLAIN OF THEM ALL.
I'D SIMPLY BE TRADING A PACK OF DEMONS FOR THE DEVIL HIMSELF
AND IF I CONSENTED TO MASS MURDER--EVEN OF FIENDS LIKE THE JOKER--I'D BE WORSE THAN THE DEVIL...
..BECAUSE I KNOW BETTER
YOU'VE LEARNED NOTHING FROM MY WARNING, DETECTIVE...
KNOW YOUR FOES--KNOW WHO THEY ARE.
I AM NOT ONE OF THEM
CRAWL BACK TO THE HELL YOU CAME FROM, RA'S!
I'LL BRING DOWN EVERY LAST VILLAIN BY MYSELF AND MAYBE I'LL EVEN START WITH YOU!
ONE LAST TIME, DETECTIVE
TONIGHT I'VE UNLEASHED EVERYTHING YOUR WORLD HAS TO OFFER; CHOOSE MY WORLD AND I'LL HELP YOU END IT ALL FOREVER.
CHOOSE YOUR WORLD AND I WILL SIMPLY FADE AWAY, LEAVING YOU TO DROWN IN THE UNLEASHED EVIL...
ALONE
AND WHAT STOPS ME FROM STARTING MY JOB RIGHT HERE AND NOW?--
--FROM TAKING YOUR UGLY FACE IN MY HANDS AND RIPPING IT RIGHT OFF YOUR DAMNED SKULL?
19

I AM THE ONLY MAN IN THE WORLD, DETECTIVE, WHO KNOWS WHAT YOUR ENEMIES PLAN TO DO
INDEED, THEY ARE ENACTING A PLAN I GAVE THEM
G
AND SHOULD YOU FAIL TO STOP THEM, I AM THE ONLY MAN IN THE WORLD. .
WHO CAN AVENGE YOUR DEATH.
GR
GR
R
RRRR
RRRR
OH, AND ONE LAST THING, DETECTIVE .
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY
GGGGR
RRRRR
RAH!
R

KING
AND FOR MY GIFT A CLUE FROM THE RIDDLER, ALTHOUGH NOT A QUESTION...
AND THE CLUE IS--?
AN ANSWER, DETECTIVE...
"PINOCCHIO AND JONAH'S, TOO."
HE FREEZES.
...TURNING FROM THE STAIRS, TO STRIDE BACK TOWARD HIS WHEELS.
LIBERTY
TELL THE RIDDLER IT'S A DATE, DEMON.
HE THINKS.
AND HE CHANGES HIS MIND.

HEY, BATMAN-- WAIT UP!
WHAT'S WITH THE BIG PENNY AND THE DESK BACK THERE?
AND WHAT ABOUT ALFRE'S SANDWICHES?
WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
A DATE WITH THE RIDDLER.
THE RIDDLER!
THEN HE'S THE ONE THAT LOUSY MESSAGE IS ABOUT?
HIM AND OTHERS
HUH? WHAT OTHERS--?
CHAPTER V
"PINOCCHIO and JONAH'S, TOO!"
TERRY AUSTIN
ILLUSTRATED BY: ARTHUR ADAMS & TERRY AUSTIN
ALL THE OTHERS-- ALL MY FOES.
RÄS AL GHÜL HAS FREED ALL OF THEM-- AND HE WAS JUST HERE TO GLOAT ABOUT IT.
YOU'RE KIDDING! IN THE BATCAVE?
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN OUR COMPUTER REVIEW ALREADY? RÄS AL GHÜL, ALONE OF ALL MY ARCH-ENEMIES, KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT ME-- INCLUDING THE LOCATION OF WAYNE MANOR AND THE BATCAVE.
AND HE CAME HERE, AS HE DID THE FIRST TIME I MET HIM... TO TEMPT ME.
22

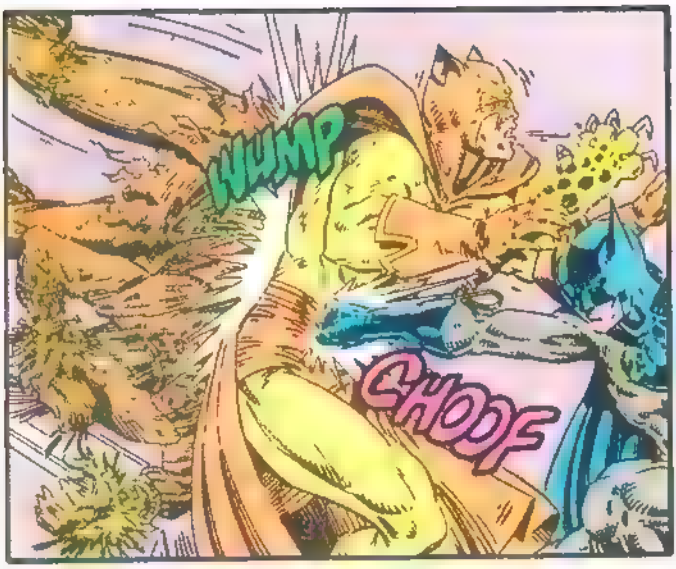

GOTHAM, AFTER A TEN MINUTE BRIEFING AT 25 MPS:
HIS NAME IN ARABIC MEANS "DEMON'S HEAD," BUT IT ALSO SIGNIFIES "THE MISCHIEF MAKER" WHO APPEARED AS A GHOUL IN THE ARABIAN NIGHTS -
--AND THERE'S NO GREATER MISCHIEF THAN THIS.
YOU SAY HE GAVE YOU A CLUE FROM THE RIDDLER BEFORE DOING HIS FADE-OUT?
A CLUE IN REVERSE -- THE RIDDLER'S ANSWER
.. WHICH I FIRST HEARD AS "PINOCCHIO AND JONAH'S TOO" OR "PINOCCHIO AND JONAH IS TWO"...
BEFORE I REALIZED THAT IF IT CAME FROM THE RIDDLER'S TWISTED MIND, THE ANSWER HAD TO BE--
-- PINOCCHIO AND JONAH STEW"
IF YOU SAY SO, SHERLOCK. . BUT WHAT DOES THAT MAKE THE RIDDLER'S QUESTION?
THE EXACT WORDING DOESN'T MATTER, BUT WHATEVER THE CLUE REFERS TO..
. . WE'LL FIND IT IN HERE.
IT'S RUN BY A TOAD NAMED STICK' CHAMALO WHO SELLS DOPE ON THE SIDE -- AND I WOULDN'T PUT IT PAST HIM TO BE RUBBING WARTS WITH RAS, THE RIDDLER
OR THE DEVIL HIMSELF
UH-HUH
AND YOU REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT WE MAY BE WALTZING RIGHT INTO THE JAWS OF A TRAP?
KID, I KNOW IT'S A TRAP
23

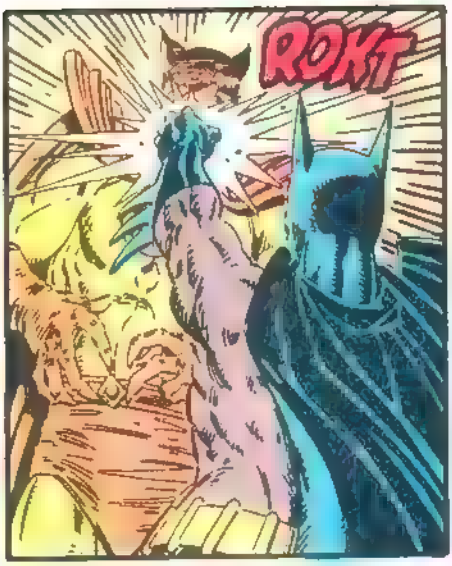
AIT ADAMS 2.94

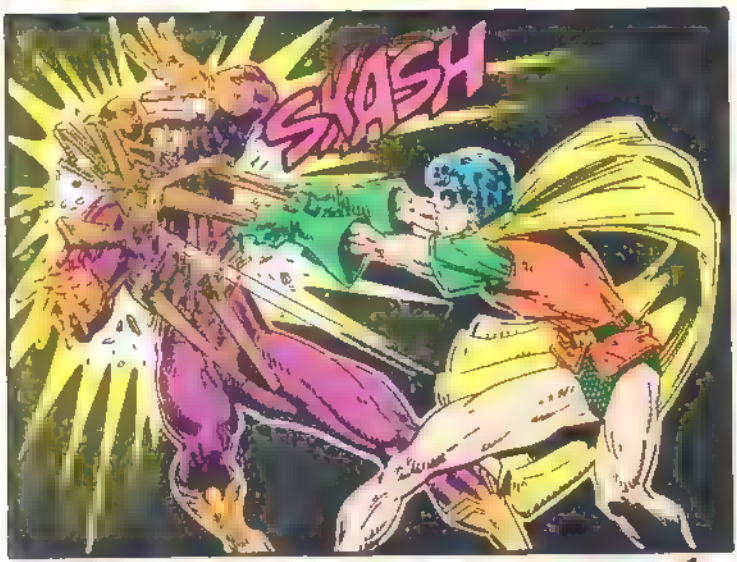
WHILE, BACK IN THE BATCAVE
INTRUDER ALERT
DEET DEET DEET DEET DEET
. AND IN THE KITCHEN OF THE MANOR ABOVE. .
EH--?
DEETDEETDEETDEE
THE ALARM BOARD! SOMEONE HAS INVADED THE MANOR...
DEETDEETDEETDEE
...BUT THROUGH WHICH ROOM?
LOOKS LIKE THE LIGHT FOR THE--
--D-PANTRY
HIYA, SHORTY
EETDEETD
ETDE
AGH-H!!
SHATTER!!
QUITE A KICKER, AIN'TCHA?
UNMMPH--!!
DEET
THAT'S BETTER --RELAX AND ENJOY THE DARKNESS
SURE BEATS ME HOW A SCRAWNY OLD GUY LIKE YOU COULD MEAN ANYTHING TO THE BATMAN. .
BUT I'VE ALREADY DECIDED TO JUST FOLLOW ORDERS, AND NO QUESIONS ASKED-- AT LEAST FOR NOW
DEETDEETDEETDEETDEETDEE
EXIT KILLER CROC
24

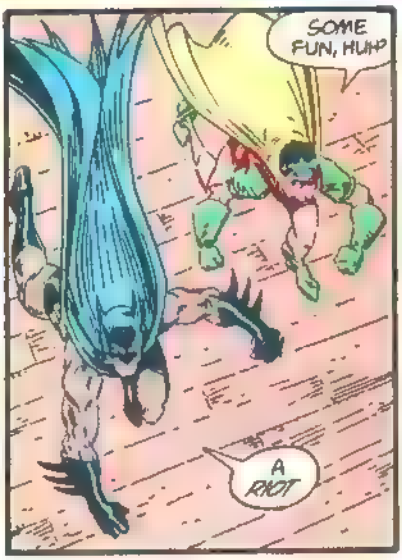
IT'S OPEN.
HIT THE FLOOR AND ROLL!
BUT--
NO PUPPET STEW IN HERE, BATMAN
NOR ANY SIGN OF STICK CHUVALO AND HIS TATTOOED WHARF RATS...
WE GAVE THEM THE NIGHT OFF, BATMAN.
UNLIKE YOU... AND JONAH... AND PINOCCHIO... THEY HAD NO BUSINESS HERE IN THE BELLY OF THE WHALE.
NOT TONIGHT, ANYWAY
IT IS THE RIDDLER!
AND HE IS HARDLY ALONE
FOUR OTHERS LURCH FROM THE SURROUNDING GLOOM-- POISON IVY, BLACK SPIDER, SCARECROW, AND CATMAN-- ALL PUPPETS OF RAS AL GHUL
AND THE JAWS OF THE TRAP CLAMP SHUT
25

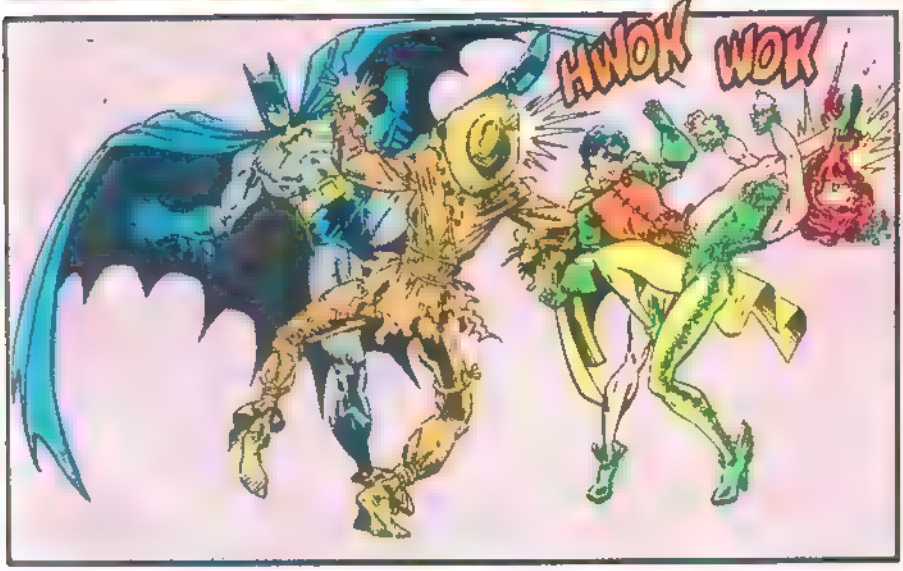
SPYDER'S STING AND POISONED THORN
TEWING
PHTOO
ALMOST FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW
FSHK
WAK
YET SLOWER BY FAR THAN THE BATARANG.
AND IVY NEARLY CHOKES ON HER OWN POISON--
THUNK
UHMPH!
-- WHILE THE BLACK SPIDER PANICS ON HIGH GROUND.
HOLD STILL, DAMN YOU!
TCHNG TCHNG TCHNG TCHNG
IT IS HIS DOWNFALL.
YOU AGAIN, HUH, SCARE-CROW?
THEN I GUESS YOU HAVEN'T LEARNED FROM THE FIRST TIME WE TANGLED...
I'M TOO OLD TO FALL FOR THE BOGEYMAN..
.. UNLESS I CHOOSE THE FALL!
20

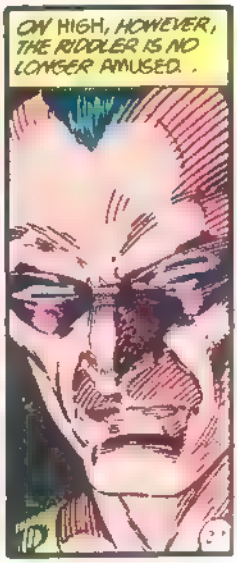

WUMP
CHOOF


ROKT


SKASH


SOME FUN, HUH?
A RIOT


HWOK
WOK

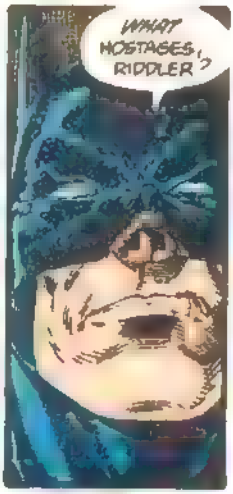

ON HIGH, HOWEVER, THE RIDDLER IS NO LONGER AMUSED.

SHHHH
ENOUGH! YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT, BATMAN.
.. AND YOU MAY HAVE EVEN WON THIS ROUND-- BUT WE'LL STILL ANSWER THE NEXT BELL
LIKE HELL YOU--
HEAR ME OUT!
CLINK

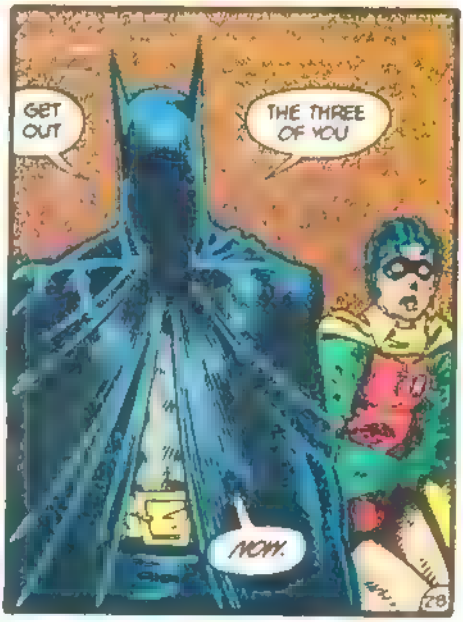
IF BLACK SPIDER AND CATMAN ARE DOWN FOR THE COUNT YOU CAN HAVE THEM...
.. BUT BEFORE YOU TRY TO PUT THE REST OF US AWAY

.. THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW
OUR, AH, ASSOCIATES ARE HOLDING THREE HOSTAGES IN A LOCATION YOU'LL NEVER FIND AND RIGHT ABOUT NOW A FOURTH CAPTIVE SHOULD BE ARRIVING THERE IN THE CUSTODY OF KILLER CROC

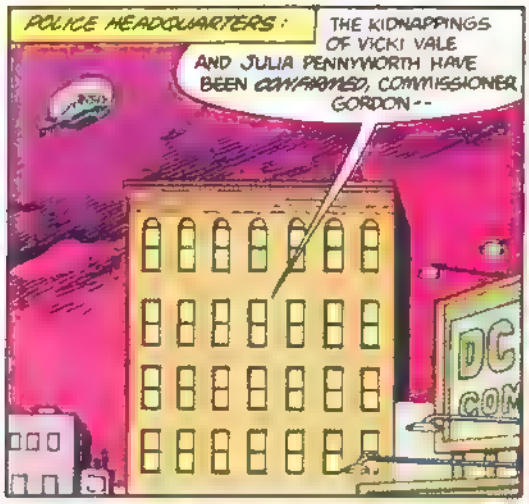
ROBIN STIFFENS AT THE NAME, THE MEMORY OF HIS MURDERED PARENTS FLOODING HIS MIND LIKE BLOOD ASWIRL IN GREASE


WHAT HOSTAGES, RIDDLER?

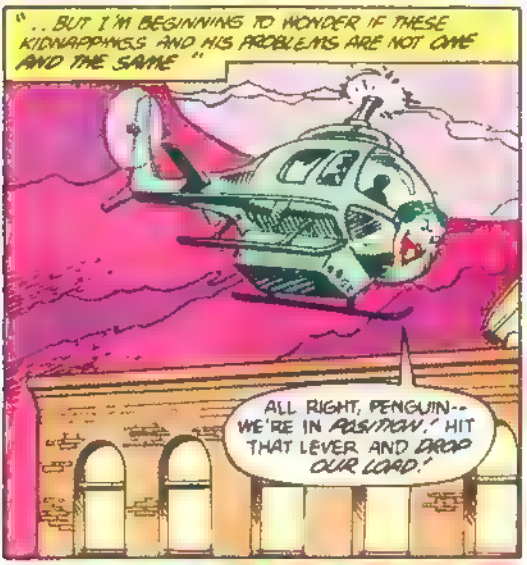
I DON'T PRETEND TO KNOW WHY BY ACCORDING TO RA'S AL GHUL, ALL FOUR OF THEM ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU
THEIR NAMES, RIDDLER!
THEIR NAMES AH, YES, THEIR NAMES.
HARVEY BULLOCK.. VICKIE VALE AND JULIA AND ALFRED PENNYWORTH

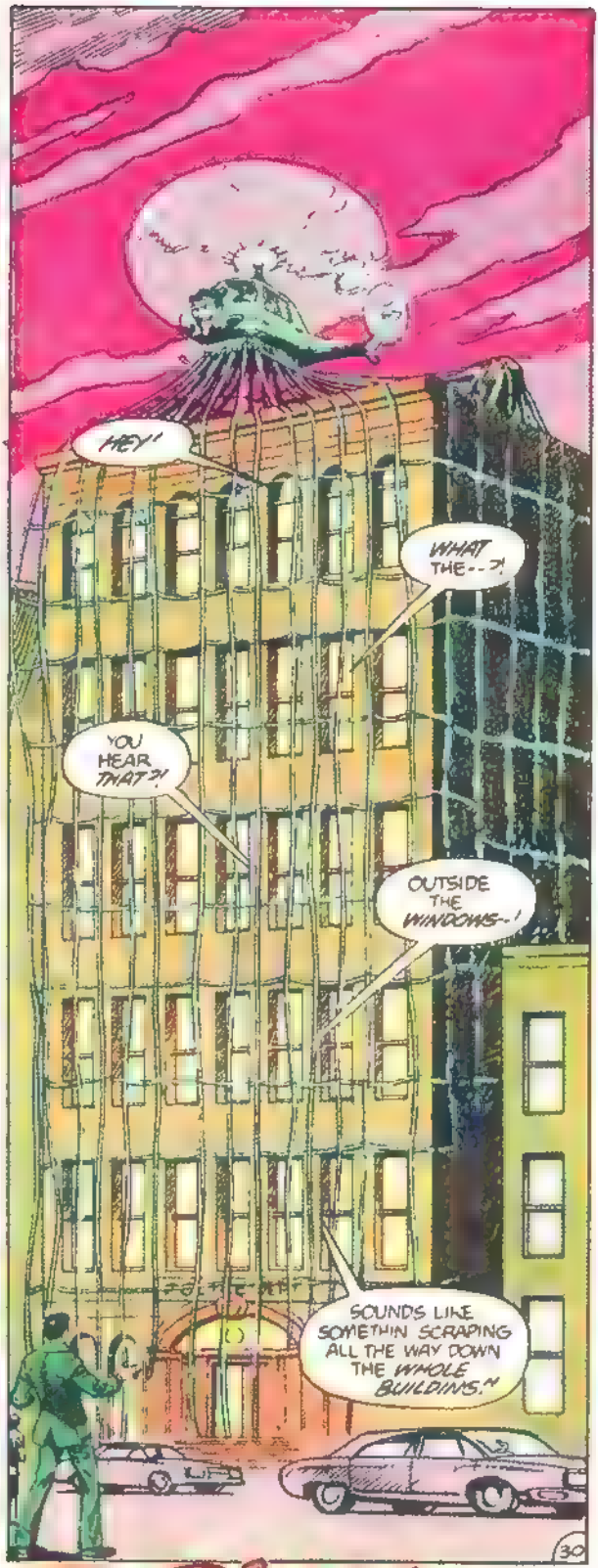

GET OUT
THE THREE OF YOU
NOW.

ALWAYS EAGER TO PLEASE, BATMAN.
BESIDES, IT'S TIME FOR JOKER AND THE OTHERS TO HAVE THEIR TURN... AND DON'T TRY TO FOLLOW US, BATMAN, BECAUSE IF WE DON'T RETURN WITHIN THE HOUR, KILLER CROC HAS ORDERS TO SWAP FOUR MEGAS.
SLOWLY AND ONLY SLIGHTLY AS IF UNDER AN OPPRESSIVE WEIGHT THE EBON CLOAKED HEAD LIFTS
IVY'S FOOT
...THEN SLUMPS AGAIN, IN DESPAIR AND DEFEAT
DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WENT DOWN IN THAT DIVE.
... AND MAYBE ROBIN AS A BETTER PARTNER TO THE BATMAN THAN I AM...
... BUT FROM THE LOOKS OF WHO'S WALKING AWAY FROM THIS SCENE.
YOU COULD SURE FOOL THIS CATWOMAN
"HEY, BATMAN...?"
COME ON, MAN... YOU GOTTA GET UP, RIGHT...?
I MEAN, WE'VE GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE... DO SOMETHING
... AT LEAST GO BACK TO THE BATCAVE AND THINK... TRY TO WORK OUT A PLAN OR
...OR SOMETHING.
AND EVEN IF BATMAN AND I HAVE DECIDED TO SPLIT FOR A WHILE, THERE'S NO LAW THAT SAYS I CAN'T STALK CRIME ON MY OWN.
"PLEASE, BATMAN? PLEASE...?"
BUT DEEP IN THE SHADOWS OF THE BELLY OF THE WHALE, THERE IS NO REPLY


POLICE HEADQUARTERS:
THE KIDNAPPINGS OF VICKI VALE AND JULIA PENNYWORTH HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED, COMMISSIONER GORDON--
DC COM

--AND I CAN'T REACH BULLOCK AT HIS HOME PHONE.
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO CALL IN THE BATMAN, SIR?
MAYBE IT IS, OFFICER.
I'VE HELD OFF THIS LONG KNOWING THE BATMAN'S GOT OTHER PROBLEMS TO DEAL WITH...

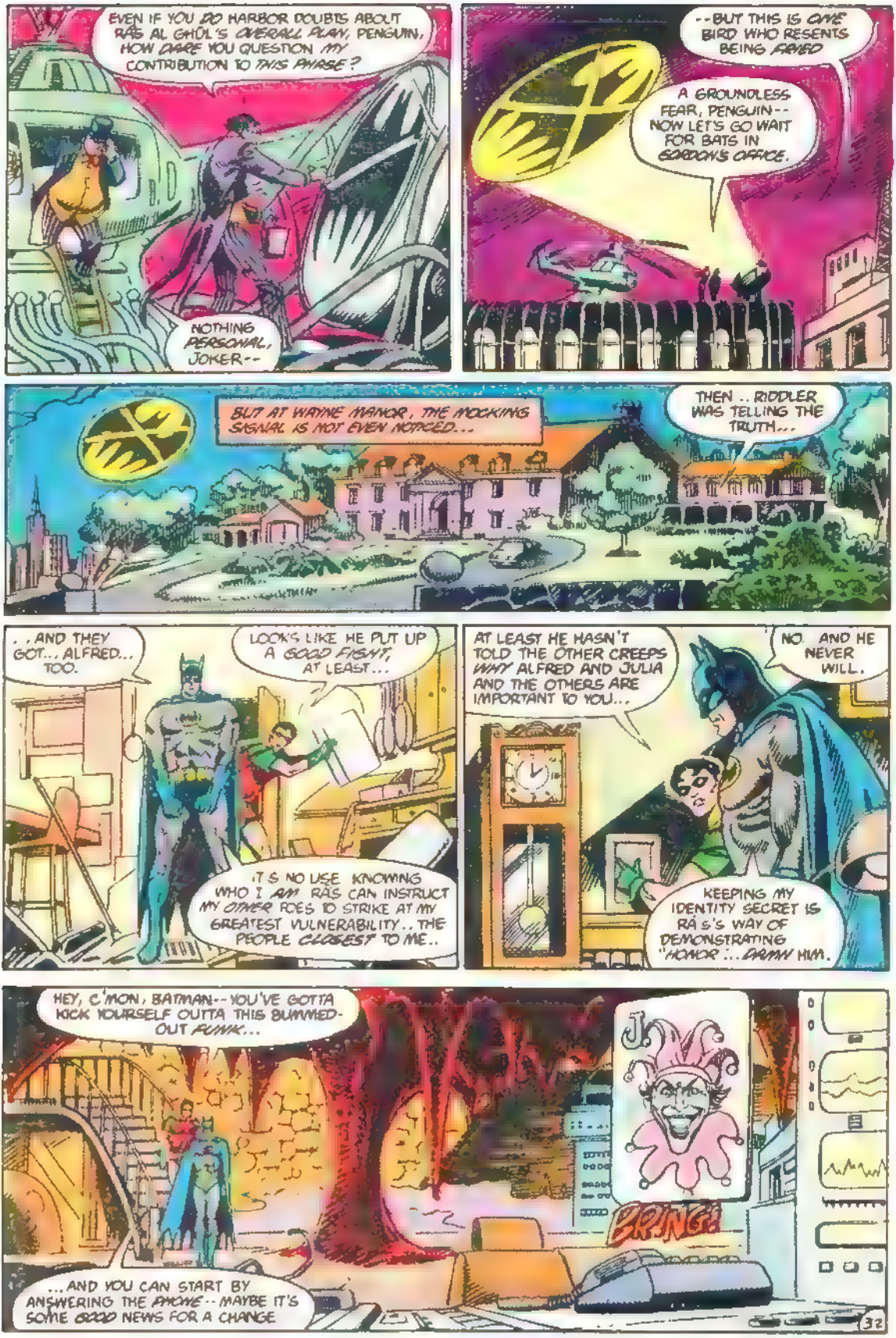

"...BUT I'M BEGINNING TO WONDER IF THESE KIDNAPPINGS AND HIS PROBLEMS ARE NOT ONE AND THE SAME."
ALL RIGHT, PENGUIN--WE'RE IN POSITION.' HIT THAT LEVER AND DROP OUR LOAD!'



CHAPTER VI: BARRED

ILLUSTRATED BY TOM SUTTON & RICARDO VILLAGRAN

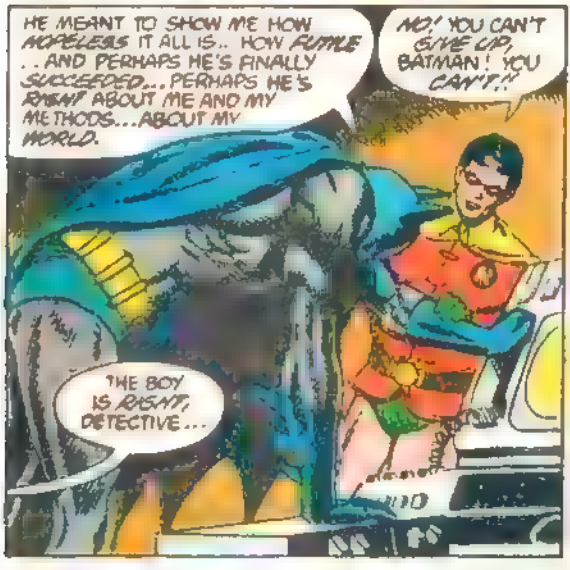
NOT BAD, JOKER.
IT'S PERFECT, YOU DOLT! WE'VE TURNED THE POLICE STATION INSIDE-OUT-- PUTTING BARS ON THE OUTSIDE TO MAKE PRISONERS OF THE COPS!
"NOW WE JUST HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE MAD HATTER AND THE OTHERS TO MAKE THEIR MOVE."
LOOKS LIKE THE WHOLE BUILDING IS... CASED!
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST, COPPERS--
-- AND YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT...
...NOT TO MENTION UNCONSCIOUS.
WE'RE ALL IN, HATTER-- YOU CAN TURN ON THE JUICE.
BUT OF COURSE, MY DEAR-- JUST AS SOON AS I ADJUST MY TRANSMITTER'S FREQUENCY TO THE SIGNALS FROM UP IN THE JOKER'S CHOPPER...
THE ROOF PORTION OF THE BAR-NETTING HAD BETTER BE WELL INSULATED, JOKER--
--BECAUSE THE HATTER JUST ELECTRIFIED THE WHOLE CASE

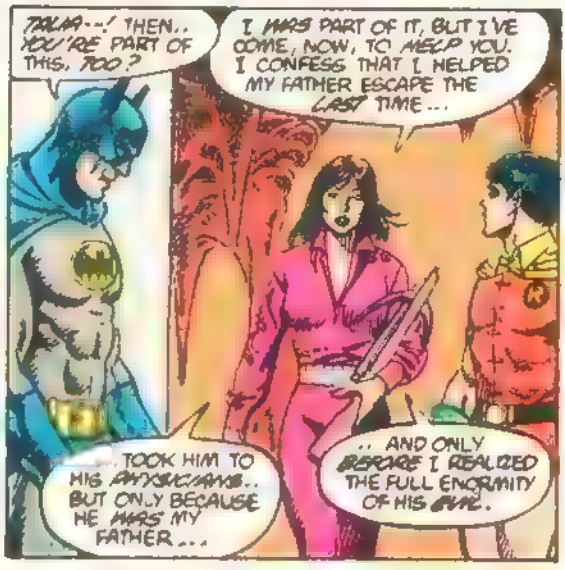

EVEN IF YOU DO HARBOR DOUBTS ABOUT RAS AL GHUL'S OVERALL PLAN, PENGUIN, HOW DARE YOU QUESTION MY CONTRIBUTION TO THIS PHASE?
NOTHING PERSONAL, JOKER--
--BUT THIS IS ONE BIRD WHO RESENTS BEING FRIED
A GROUNDLESS FEAR, PENGUIN-- NOW LET'S GO WAIT FOR BATS IN GORDON'S OFFICE.
BUT AT WAYNE MANOR, THE MOCKING SIGNAL IS NOT EVEN NOTICED...
THEN .. RIDDLER WAS TELLING THE TRUTH...
..AND THEY GOT... ALFRED... TOO.
LOOKS LIKE HE PUT UP A GOOD FIGHT, AT LEAST...
IT'S NO USE KNOWING WHO I AM! RAS CAN INSTRUCT MY OTHER FOES TO STRIKE AT MY GREATEST VULNERABILITY.. THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO ME..
AT LEAST HE HASN'T TOLD THE OTHER CREEPS WHY ALFRED AND JULIA AND THE OTHERS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU...
NO. AND HE NEVER WILL.
KEEPING MY IDENTITY SECRET IS RA'S'S WAY OF DEMONSTRATING "HONOR"... DAMN HIM.
HEY, C'MON, BATMAN-- YOU'VE GOTTA KICK YOURSELF OUTTA THIS BUMMED-OUT FUNK...
BRING!
...AND YOU CAN START BY ANSWERING THE PHONE-- MAYBE IT'S SOME GOOD NEWS FOR A CHANGE
32

BATMAN? THIS IS GORDON. I I'VE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO INFORM YOU THAT I... I'M BEING HELD HOSTAGE, ALONG WITH SOME THIRTY-FIVE OF MY MEN
GO ON, COMMISSIONER - TELL HIM THE REST
AND I HAVE BEEN FURTHER INSTRUCTED TO TELL YOU--
-- THAT POLICE HEADQUARTERS ITSELF IS ALSO BEING HELD HOSTAGE. YOU HAVE THREE HOURS TO MEET THE DEMANDS
WHAT DEMANDS, GORDON?
THEY.. THEY'RE INSANE, BATMAN! THE WHOLE THING IS BEING DONE FOR ITS OWN SAKE AND NO OTHER! IT--
I'LL TAKE THAT PHONE, COMMISSIONER!
THE DEMANDS, BATS, ARE THAT YOU RESCUE GORDON AND HIS COPS.
IF YOU FAIL TO DO SO WITHIN THREE HOURS, I'LL START KILLING THEM, ONE BY ONE, AT FIVE MINUTE INTERVALS.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
SRLRP!
HA HA HA HA HA
IT'S... OVER
WHAT ABOUT THE MONEY, YOU TREACHEROUS JACKANAPE? RA'S AL GHUL INSISTED BATMAN WOULD HAVE A WAY OF COMING UP WITH IT! YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO DEMAND TEN MILLION BUCKS!!
BUT DON'T YOU SEE, PENGUIN? ONLY BECAUSE RA'S THINKS THAT'S WHAT I WANT...

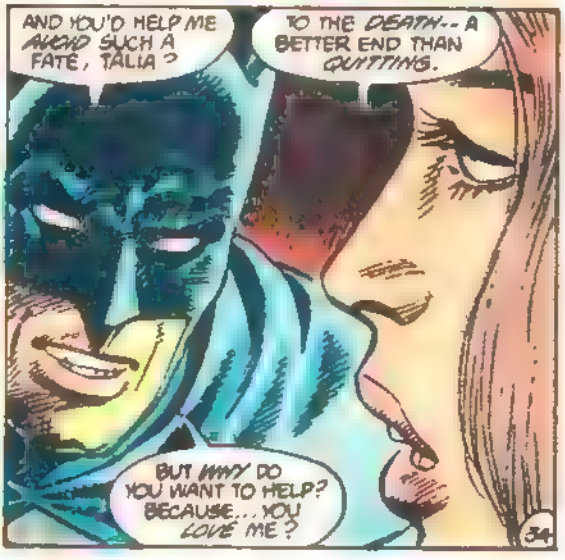
...BUT MONEY'S EASY TO GET. WHILE THE THRILL FOR ME HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE GAME ITSELF--GOING UP AGAINST BATS!
YOU YOU! YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT, JOKER, NOT TO THE REST OF US! YOU RE CRAZY!!
SURPRISE, SURPRISE! HAHAHAHA

WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN... OVER?
ALFRED, JULIA, VICKI, BULLOCK, GORDON... TOO MANY VICTIMS TO SAVE, TOO MANY FOES TO FIGHT.
"KNOW YOUR FOES," HE SAID... AND HE MEANT ALL OF THEM...
... BUT HE MEANT MORE THAN THAT, TOO...

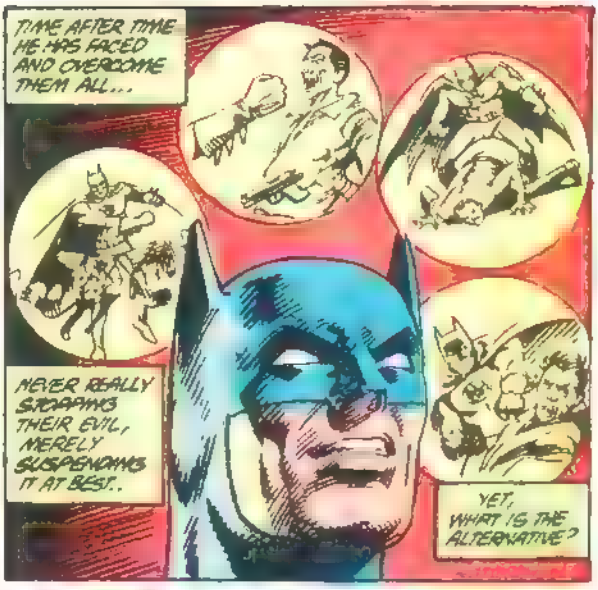

HE MEANT TO SHOW ME HOW HOPELESS IT ALL IS.. HOW FUTILE ..AND PERHAPS HE'S FINALLY SUCCEEDED... PERHAPS HE'S RIGHT ABOUT ME AND MY METHODS...ABOUT MY WORLD.
NO! YOU CAN'T GIVE UP, BATMAN! YOU CAN'T!!
THE BOY IS RIGHT, DETECTIVE...

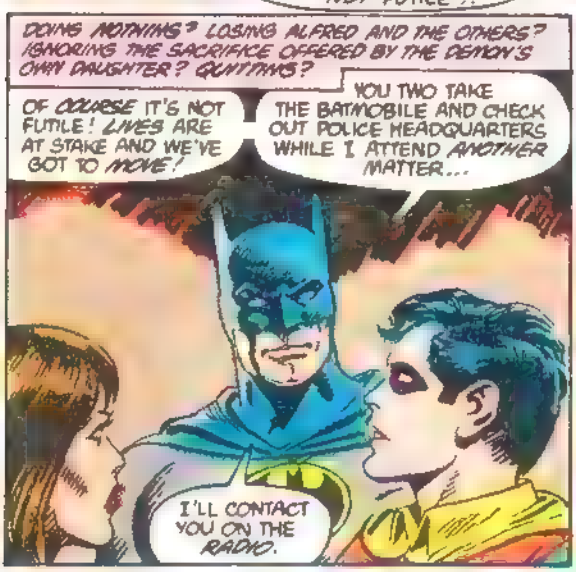

TALIA--! THEN.. YOU'RE PART OF THIS, TOO?
I WAS PART OF IT, BUT I'VE COME, NOW, TO HELP YOU. I CONFESS THAT I HELPED MY FATHER ESCAPE THE LAST TIME...
... TOOK HIM TO HIS PHYSICIANS.. BUT ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS MY FATHER...
.. AND ONLY BEFORE I REALIZED THE FULL ENORMITY OF HIS EVIL.

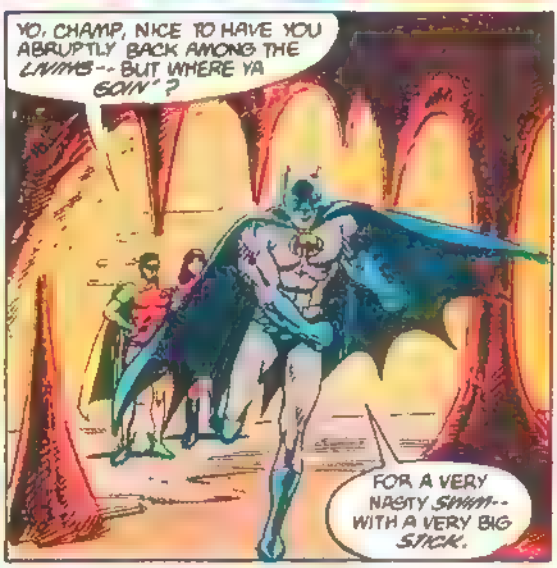
IT MAY BE TOO LATE FOR YOU OR ANYONE TO HELP, TALIA...
DON'T YOU SEE? HE'S NOT REALLY TRYING TO WIN YOU OVER TO HIS SIDE-- AND HE'S NOT EVEN TRYING TO USE THE JOKER AND HIS OTHER SURROGATES TO DEFEAT YOU.
HE'S TRYING TO DESTROY YOU AS A MAN-- TO SHATTER YOUR SPIRIT ONCE AND FOR ALL!
SIMPLY SO HE CAN SMILE

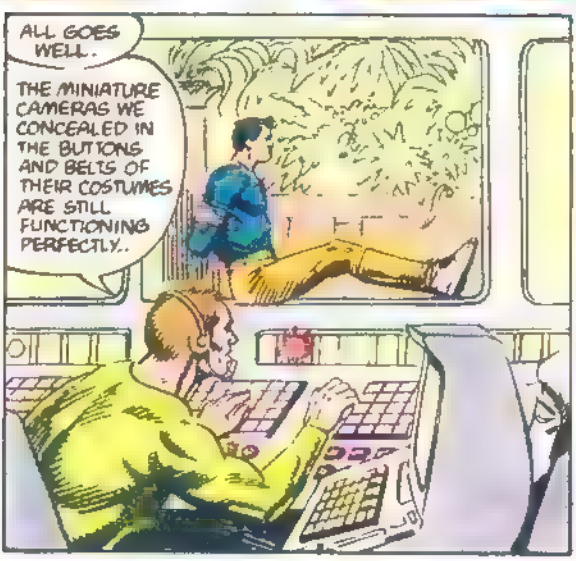

AND YOU'D HELP ME AVOID SUCH A FATE, TALIA?
TO THE DEATH-- A BETTER END THAN QUITTING.
BUT WHY DO YOU WANT TO HELP? BECAUSE... YOU LOVE ME?

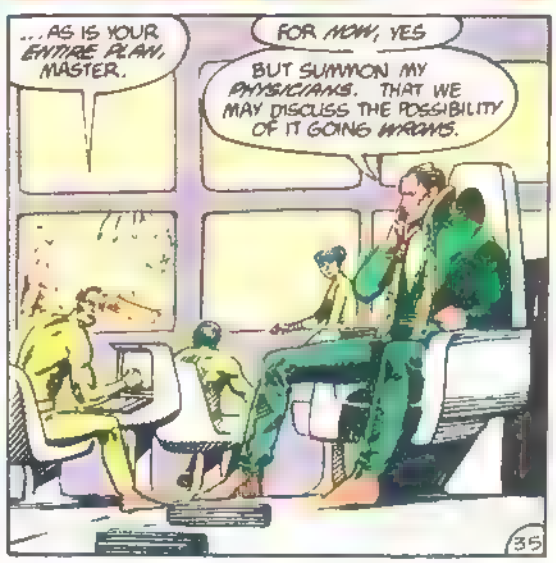
YES! BUT MORE THAN THAT-- BECAUSE I WOULD RATHER DIE IN YOUR WORLD THAN LIVE IN HIS!
YOU... YOU'RE HIS DAUGHTER. AND IF YOU FEEL THAT WAY, PERHAPS MY ENDLESS STRUGGLE IS NOT FUTILE...

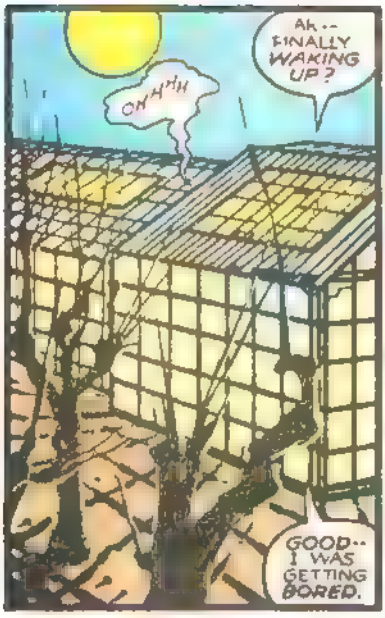

TIME AFTER TIME HE HAS FACED AND OVERCOME THEM ALL...
NEVER REALLY STOPPING THEIR EVIL, MERELY SUSPENDING IT AT BEST..
YET, WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?


DOING NOTHING? LOSING ALFRED AND THE OTHERS? IGNORING THE SACRIFICE OFFERED BY THE DEMON'S OWN DAUGHTER? QUITTING?
OF COURSE IT'S NOT FUTILE! LIVES ARE AT STAKE AND WE'VE GOT TO MOVE!
YOU TWO TAKE THE BATMOBILE AND CHECK OUT POLICE HEADQUARTERS WHILE I ATTEND ANOTHER MATTER...
I'LL CONTACT YOU ON THE RADIO.


YO, CHAMP, NICE TO HAVE YOU ABRUPTLY BACK AMONG THE LIVING-- BUT WHERE YA GOIN'?
FOR A VERY NASTY SMACK-- WITH A VERY BIG STICK.


ALL GOES WELL.
THE MINIATURE CAMERAS WE CONCEALED IN THE BUTTONS AND BELTS OF THEIR COSTUMES ARE STILL FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY..


...AS IS YOUR ENTIRE PLAN, MASTER.
FOR NOW, YES
BUT SUMMON MY PHYSICIANS. THAT WE MAY DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF IT GOING WRONG.

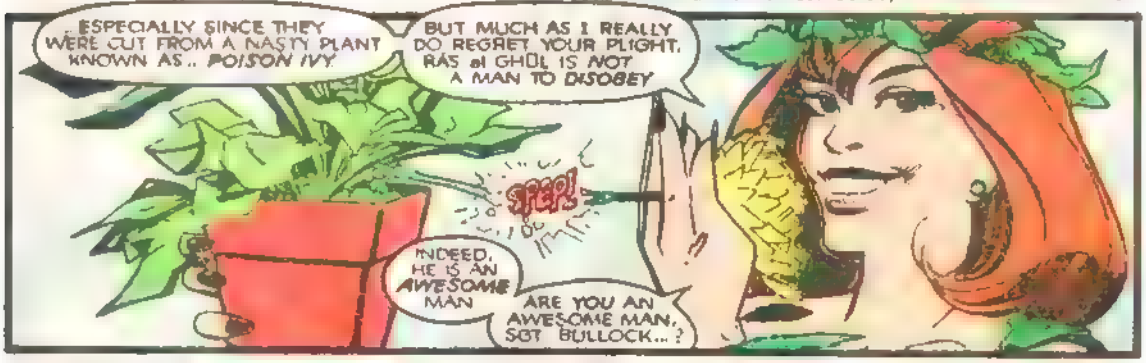


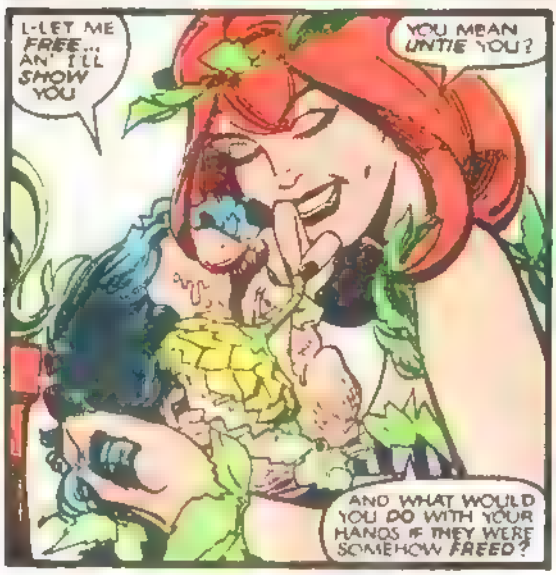
BOUND MUCH LIKE YOU, SGT. BULLOCK. BUT IN POTS
THEN IT WASN'T J-JUST A DREAM...
INDEED NOT · AND I DO HOPE THOSE VINES ARE NOT CHAFING YOU...

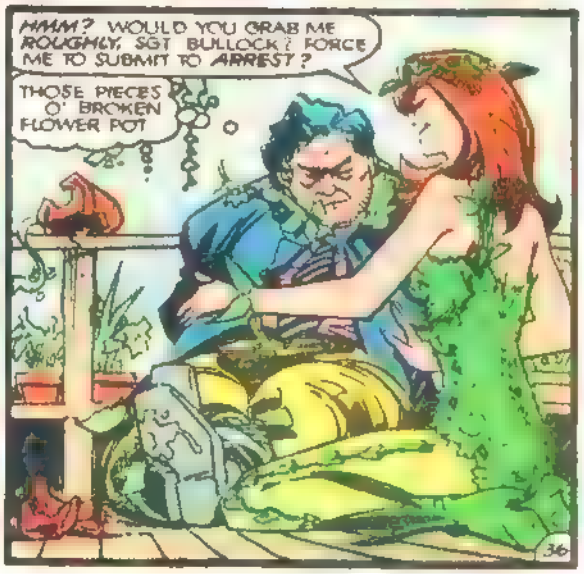
CHAPTER VII

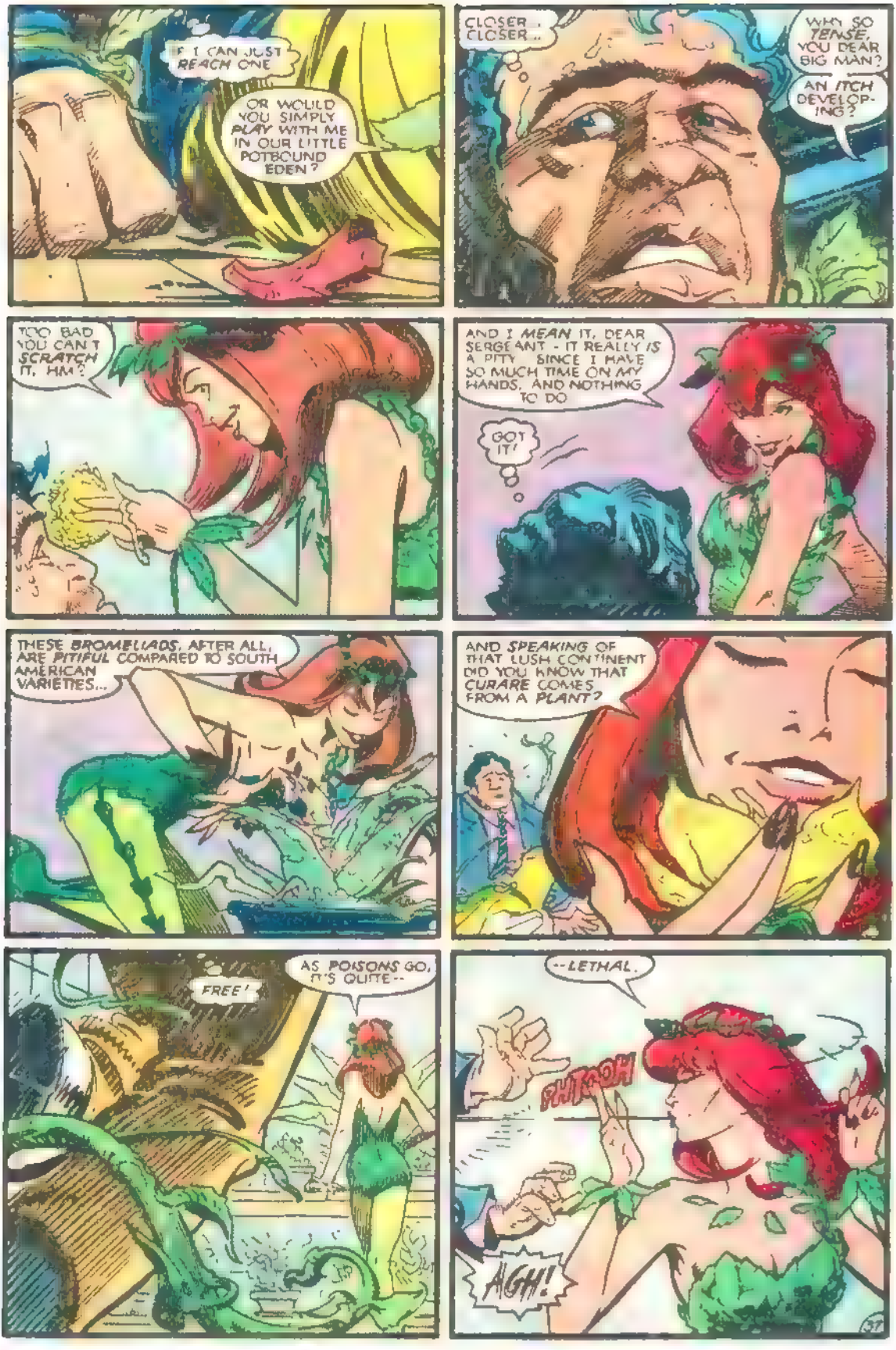
a small itch SCRATCHED!

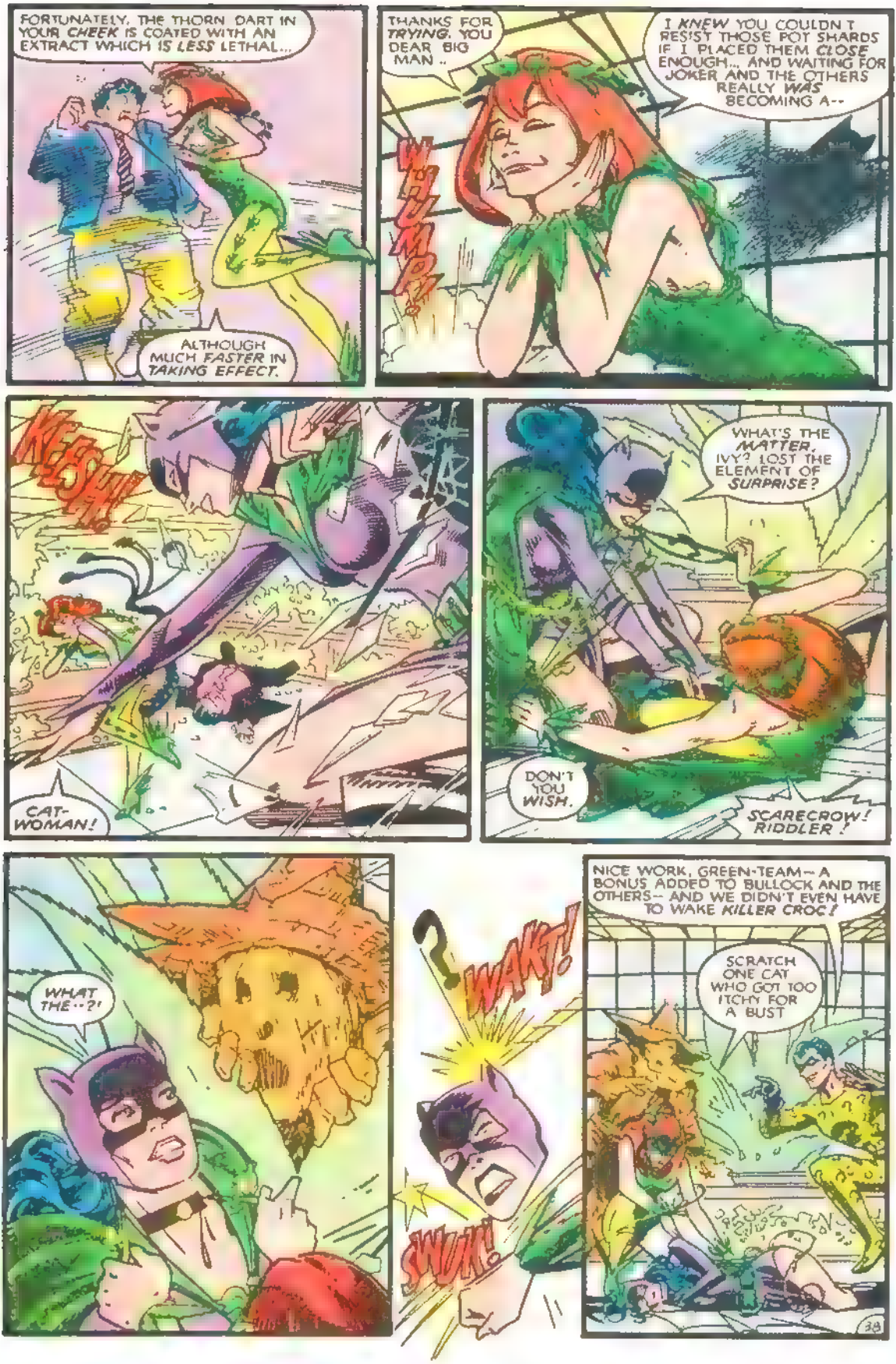
ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE LEIALOHA / LETTERS: ORZECHOWSKI

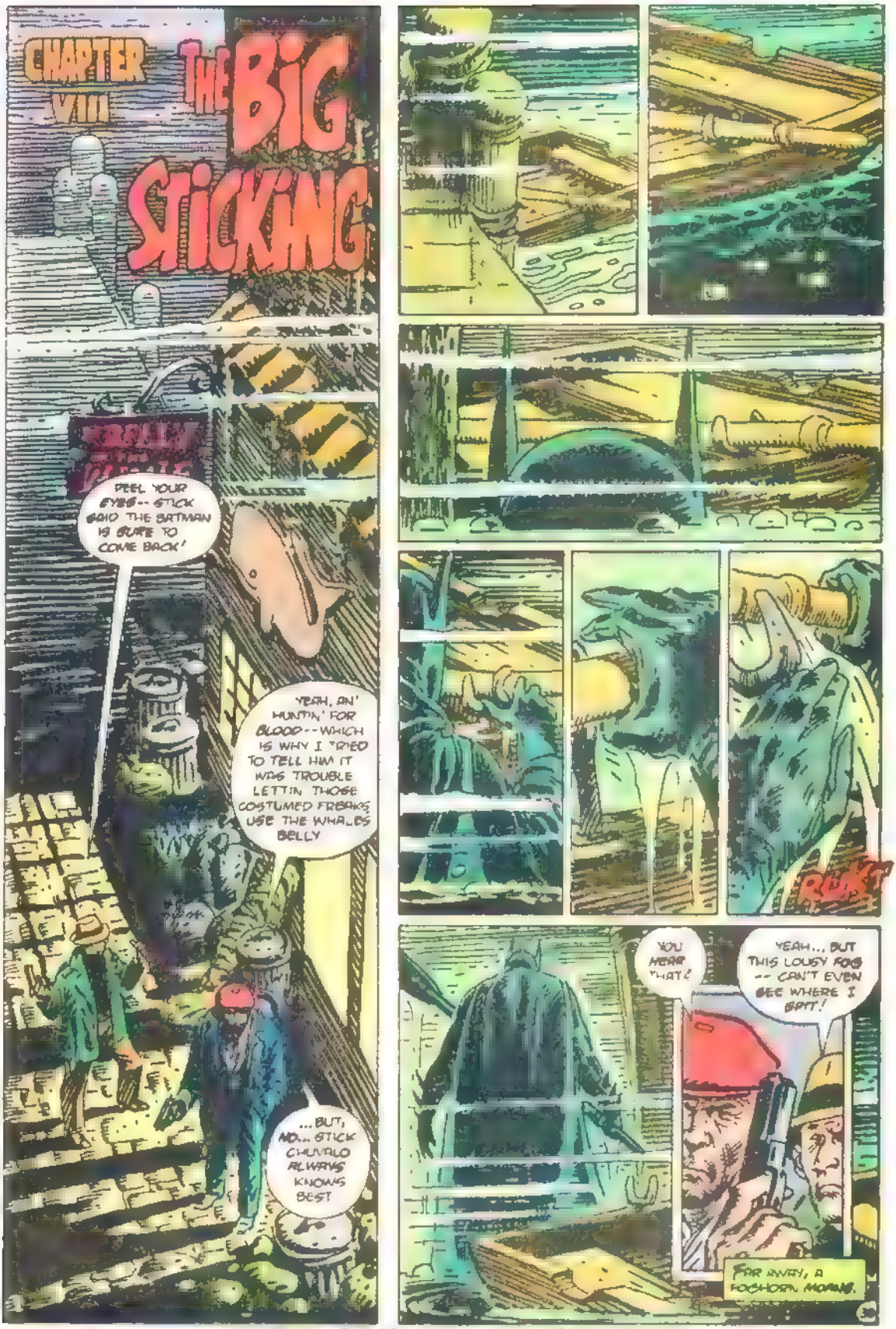

..ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY WERE CUT FROM A NASTY PLANT KNOWN AS.. POISON IVY
BUT MUCH AS I REALLY DO REGRET YOUR PLIGHT, RAS al GHÜL IS NOT A MAN TO DISOBEY
SPROING!
INDEED, HE IS AN AWESOME MAN
ARE YOU AN AWESOME MAN, SGT BULLOCK...?



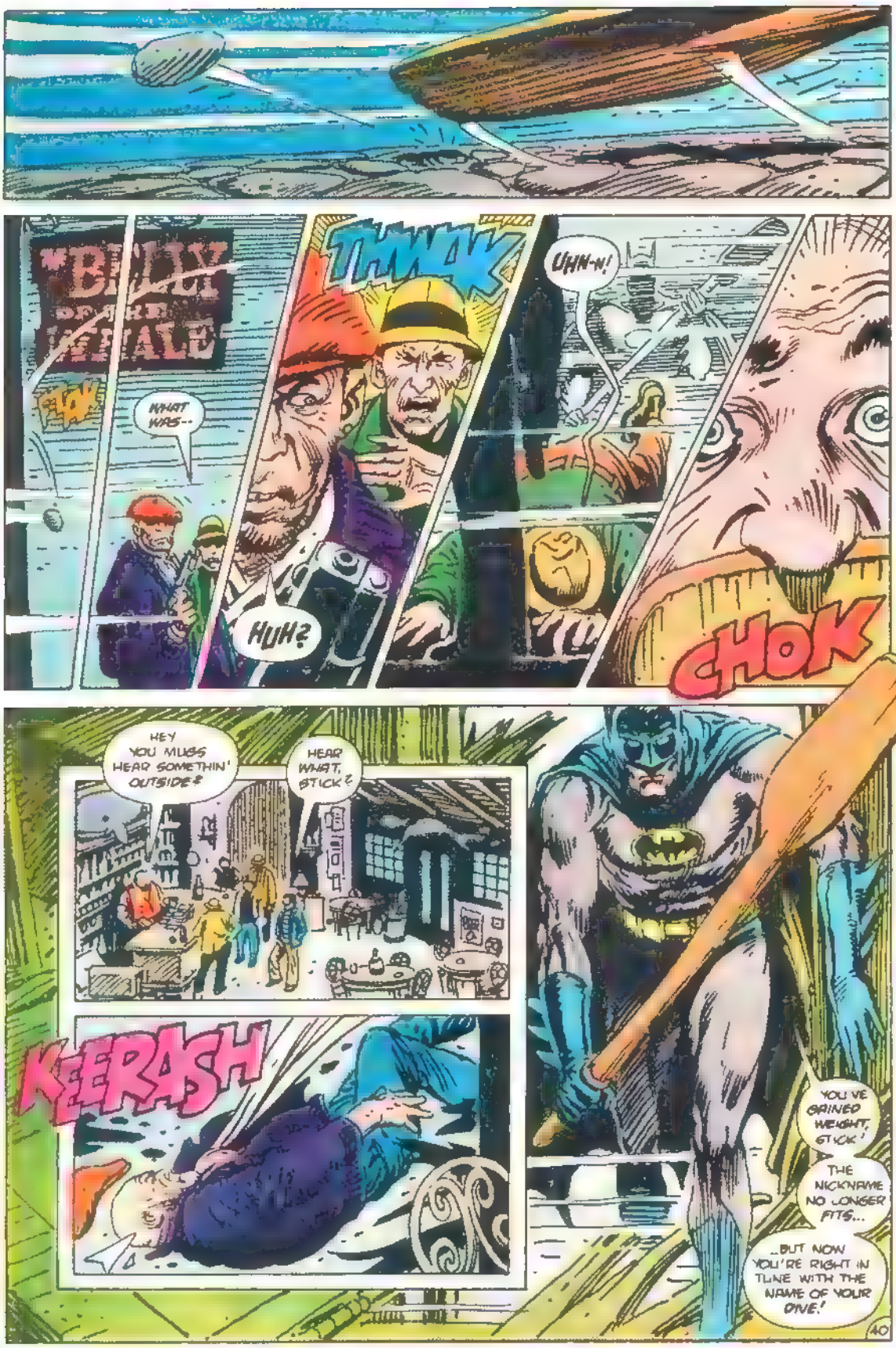


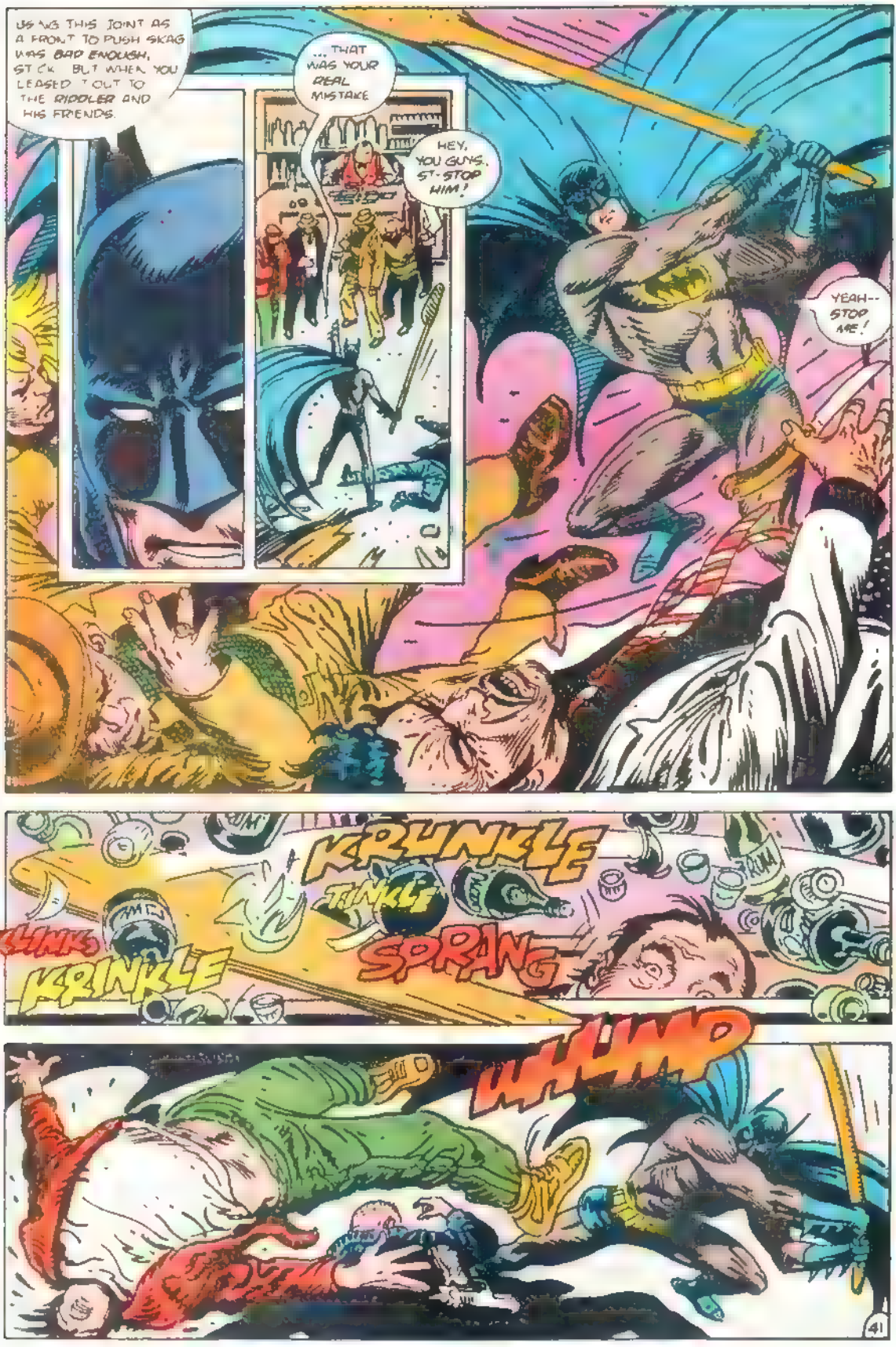

IF I CAN JUST REACH ONE
OR WOULD YOU SIMPLY PLAY WITH ME IN OUR LITTLE POTBOUND EDEN?
CLOSER... CLOSER...
WHY SO TENSE, YOU DEAR BIG MAN?
AN ITCH DEVELOPING?
TOO BAD YOU CAN'T SCRATCH IT, HM?
AND I MEAN IT, DEAR SERGEANT - IT REALLY IS A PITY SINCE I HAVE SO MUCH TIME ON MY HANDS, AND NOTHING TO DO
GOT IT!
THESE BROMELIADS, AFTER ALL, ARE PITIFUL COMPARED TO SOUTH AMERICAN VARIETIES...
AND SPEAKING OF THAT LUSH CONTINENT DID YOU KNOW THAT CURARE COMES FROM A PLANT?
FREE!
AS POISONS GO, IT'S QUITE--
--LETHAL.
PHTOOH
AGH!

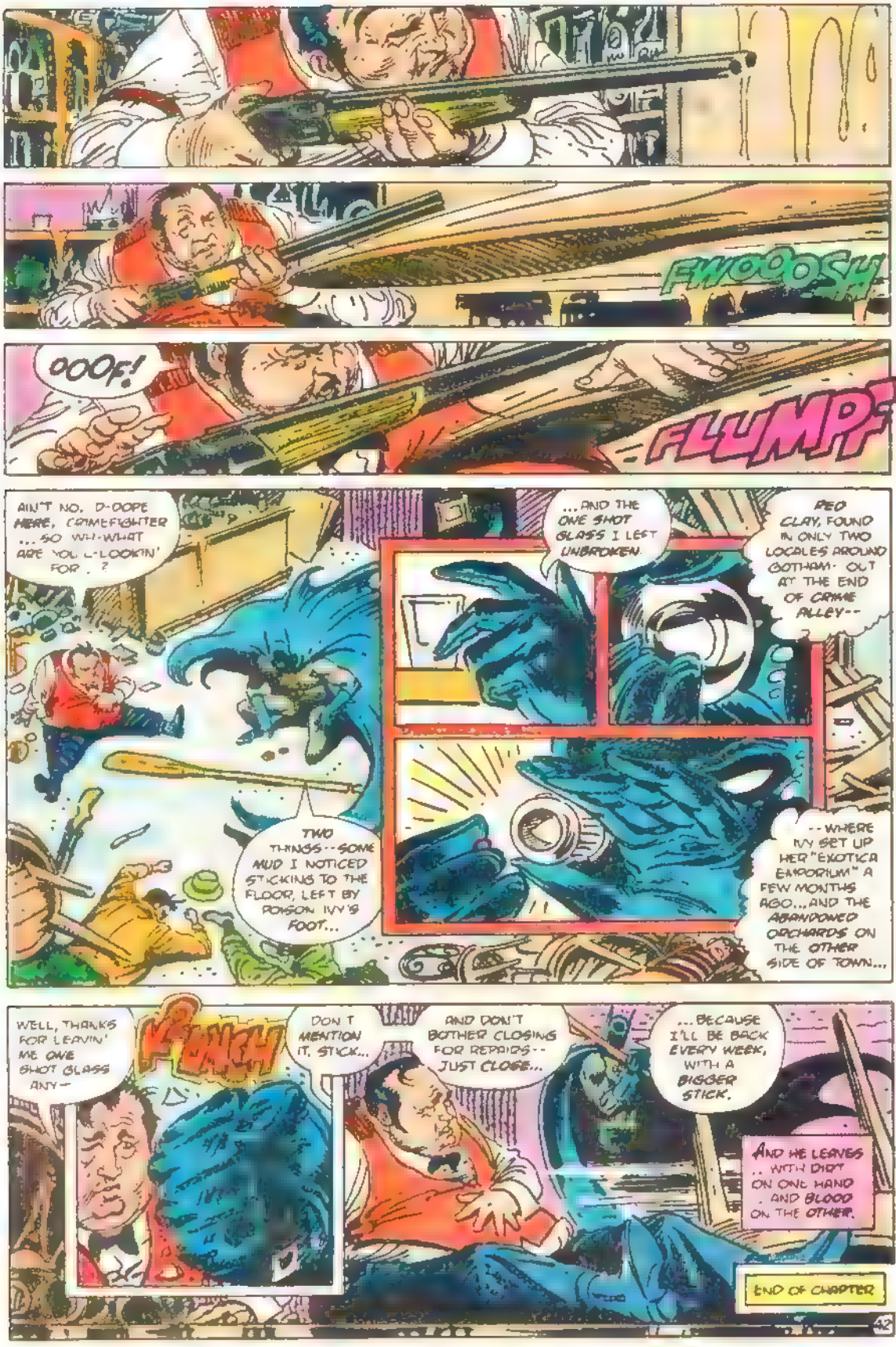

FORTUNATELY, THE THORN DART IN YOUR CHEEK IS COATED WITH AN EXTRACT WHICH IS LESS LETHAL...
ALTHOUGH MUCH FASTER IN TAKING EFFECT.
THANKS FOR TRYING, YOU DEAR BIG MAN..
I KNEW YOU COULDN'T RESIST THOSE POT SHARDS IF I PLACED THEM CLOSE ENOUGH... AND WAITING FOR JOKER AND THE OTHERS REALLY WAS BECOMING A--
KLUNK!
KE-SHH!
CAT-WOMAN!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, IVY? LOST THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE?
DON'T YOU WISH.
SCARECROW! RIDDLER!
WHAT THE--?!
WAK!
SWUK!
NICE WORK, GREEN-TEAM-- A BONUS ADDED TO BULLOCK AND THE OTHERS-- AND WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO WAKE KILLER CROC!
SCRATCH ONE CAT WHO GOT TOO ITCHY FOR A BUST
38

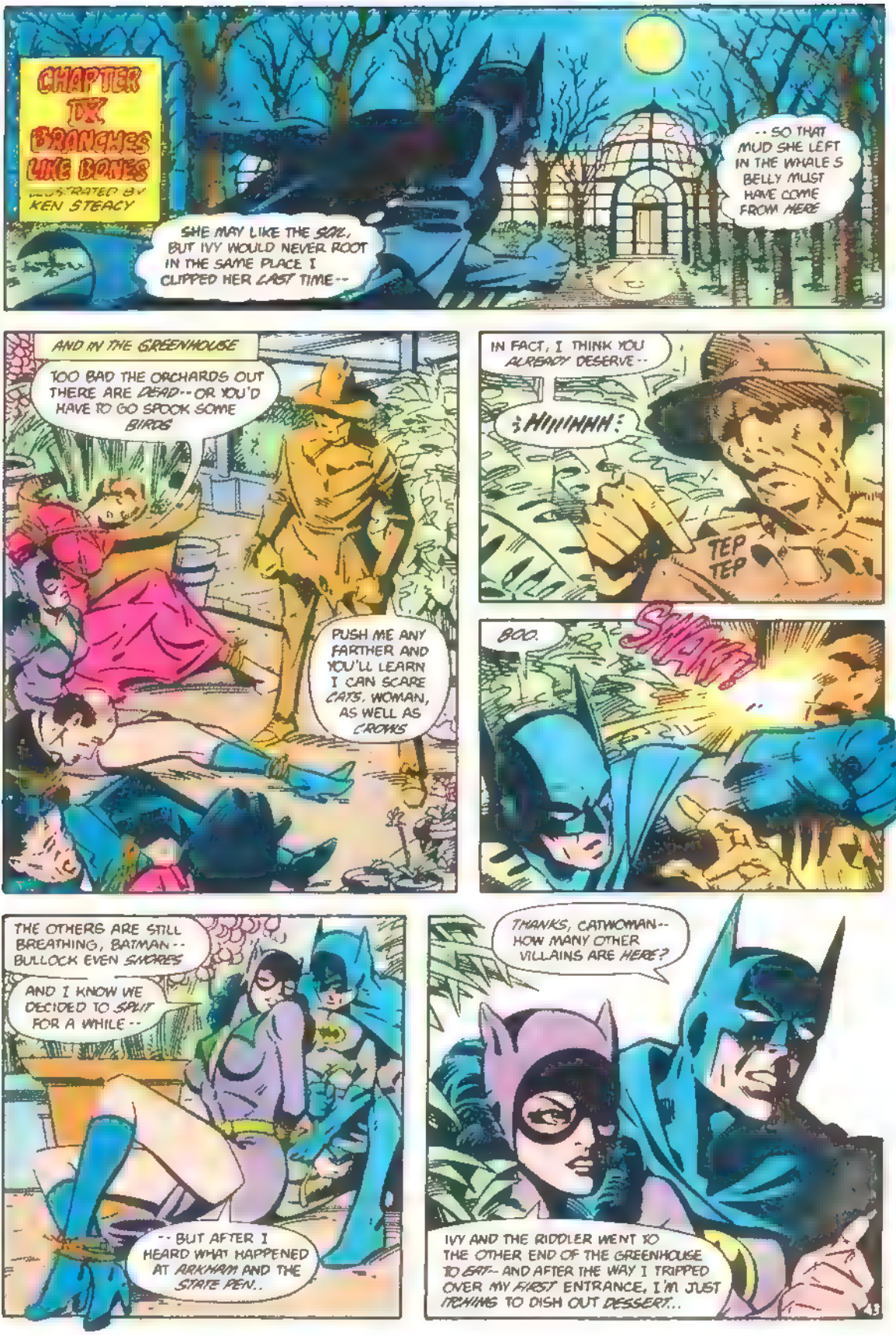

CHAPTER VIII
THE BIG STICKING
PEEL YOUR EYES-- STICK SAID THE BATMAN IS SURE TO COME BACK!
YEAH, AN' HUNTIN' FOR BLOOD--WHICH IS WHY I TRIED TO TELL HIM IT WAS TROUBLE LETTIN THOSE COSTUMED FREAKS USE THE WHALES BELLY
...BUT, NO... STICK CHUVALO ALWAYS KNOWS BEST
RUKT
YOU HEAR THAT?
YEAH.., BUT THIS LOUSY FOG -- CAN'T EVEN SEE WHERE I SPIT!
FAR AWAY, A FOGHORN MOANS.

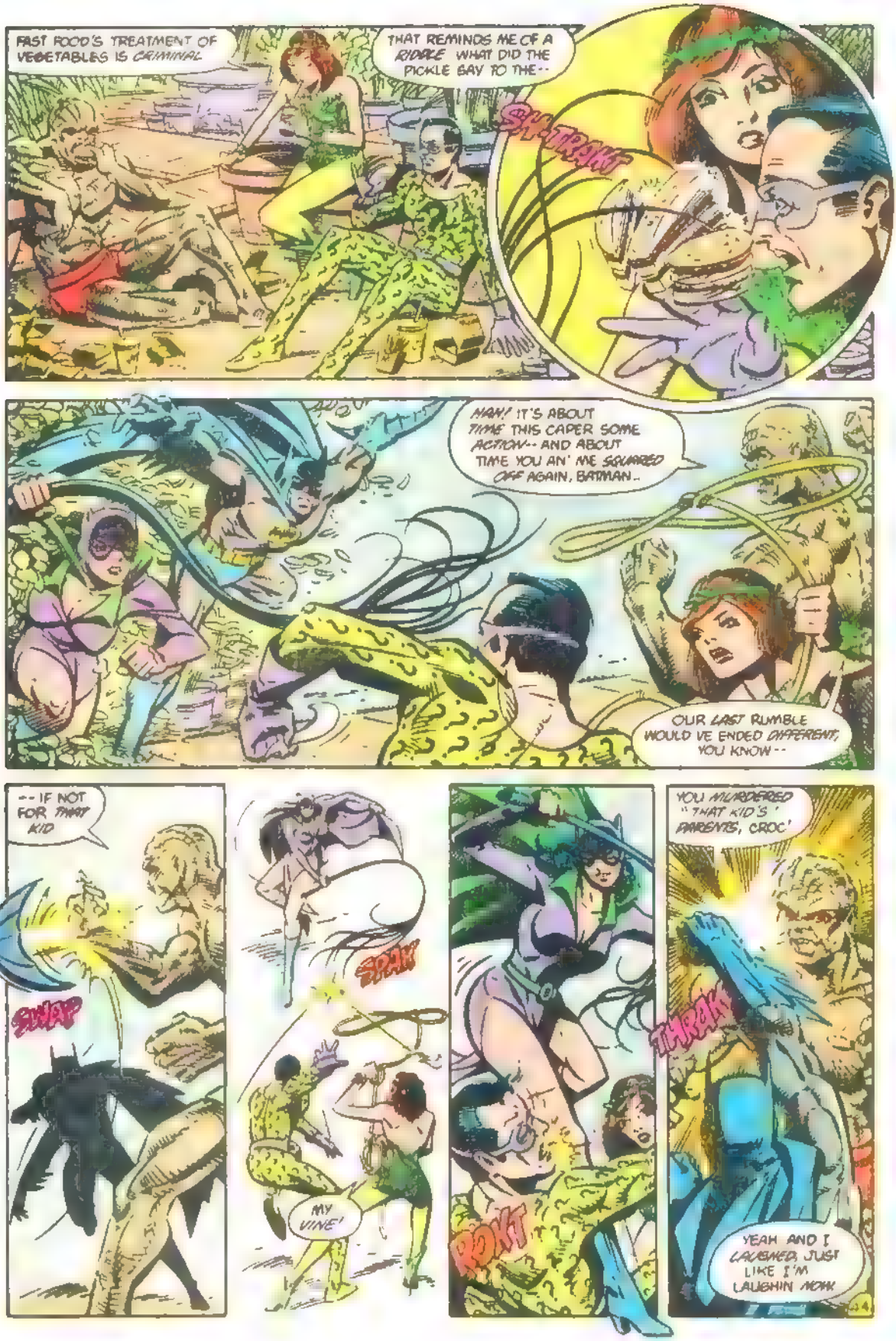
ILLUSTRATED BY: JOE KUBERT / LETTERS: ANDY KUBERT

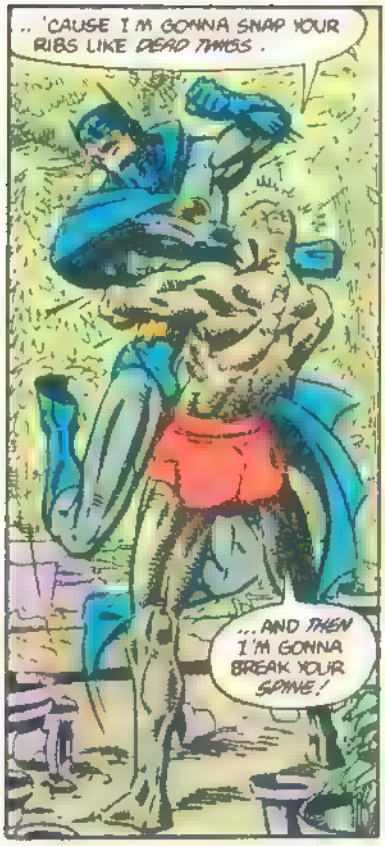

WHAT WAS--
HUH?
THWAK
UHN-N!
CHOK
HEY YOU MUGS HEAR SOMETHIN' OUTSIDE?
HEAR WHAT, STICK?
KEERASH
YOU'VE GAINED WEIGHT, STICK!
THE NICKNAME NO LONGER FITS...
...BUT NOW YOU'RE RIGHT IN TUNE WITH THE NAME OF YOUR DIVE!

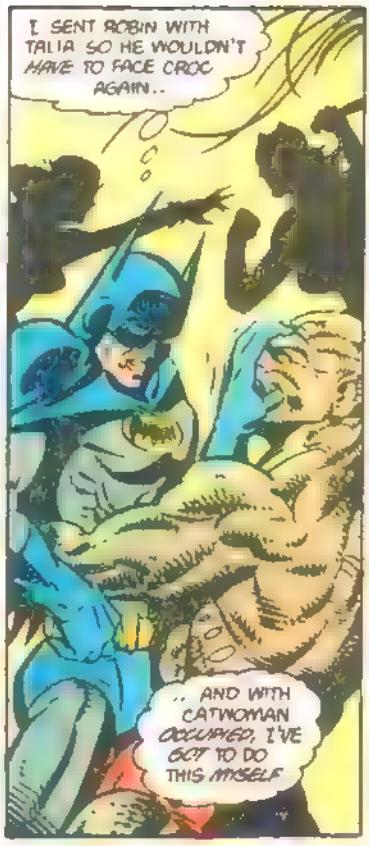

USING THIS JOINT AS A FRONT TO PUSH SKAG WAS BAD ENOUGH, STICK. BUT WHEN YOU LEASED OUT TO THE RIDDLER AND HIS FRIENDS...
...THAT WAS YOUR REAL MISTAKE
HEY, YOU GUYS. ST-STOP HIM!
YEAH-- STOP ARE!
KRUNKLE
TINKLE
SPRANG
KLINK KRINKLE
WHUMP

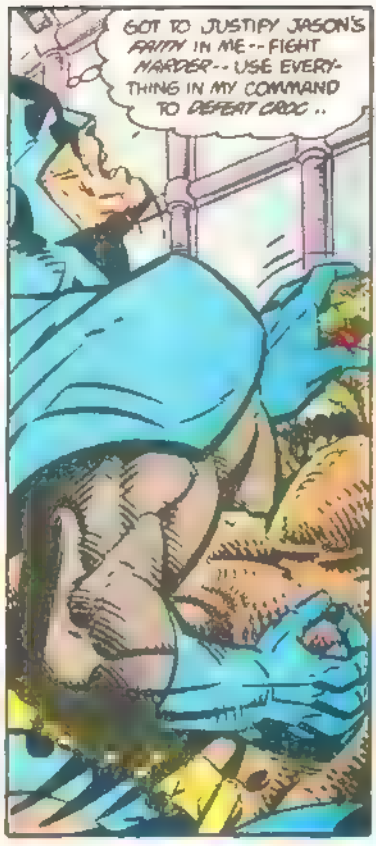

FWOOOSH
OOOF!
FLUMPF
AIN'T NO D-DOPE HERE, CRIMEFIGHTER ... SO WH-WHAT ARE YOU L-LOOKIN' FOR . ?
...AND THE ONE SHOT GLASS I LEFT UNBROKEN.
PEO CLAY, FOUND IN ONLY TWO LOCALES AROUND GOTHAM- OUT AT THE END OF CRIME ALLEY--
TWO THINGS--SOME MUD I NOTICED STICKING TO THE FLOOR, LEFT BY POISON IVY'S FOOT...
--WHERE IVY SET UP HER "EXOTICA EMPORIUM" A FEW MONTHS AGO...AND THE ABANDONED ORCHARDS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN...
WELL, THANKS FOR LEAVIN' ME ONE SHOT GLASS ANY—
KLUNCH
DON'T MENTION IT, STICK...
AND DON'T BOTHER CLOSING FOR REPAIRS-- JUST CLOSE...
...BECAUSE I'LL BE BACK EVERY WEEK, WITH A BIGGER STICK.
AND HE LEAVES .. WITH DIRT ON ONE HAND . AND BLOOD ON THE OTHER.
END OF CHAPTER


CHAPTER IX
BRANCHES LIKE BONES
ILLUSTRATED BY KEN STEACY
SHE MAY LIKE THE SOIL, BUT IVY WOULD NEVER ROOT IN THE SAME PLACE I CLIPPED HER LAST TIME--
--SO THAT MUD SHE LEFT IN THE WHALE'S BELLY MUST HAVE COME FROM HERE
AND IN THE GREENHOUSE
TOO BAD THE ORCHARDS OUT THERE ARE DEAD--OR YOU'D HAVE TO GO SPOOK SOME BIRDS
PUSH ME ANY FARTHER AND YOU'LL LEARN I CAN SCARE CATS, WOMAN, AS WELL AS CROWS
IN FACT, I THINK YOU ALREADY DESERVE--
:MMMMMH:
TEP TEP
BOO.
SMACK!
THE OTHERS ARE STILL BREATHING, BATMAN--BULLOCK EVEN SNORES
AND I KNOW WE DECIDED TO SPLIT FOR A WHILE--
--BUT AFTER I HEARD WHAT HAPPENED AT ARKHAM AND THE STATE PEN..
THANKS, CATWOMAN--HOW MANY OTHER VILLAINS ARE HERE?
IVY AND THE RIDDLER WENT TO THE OTHER END OF THE GREENHOUSE TO EAT--AND AFTER THE WAY I TRIPPED OVER MY FIRST ENTRANCE, I'M JUST ITCHING TO DISH OUT DESSERT..

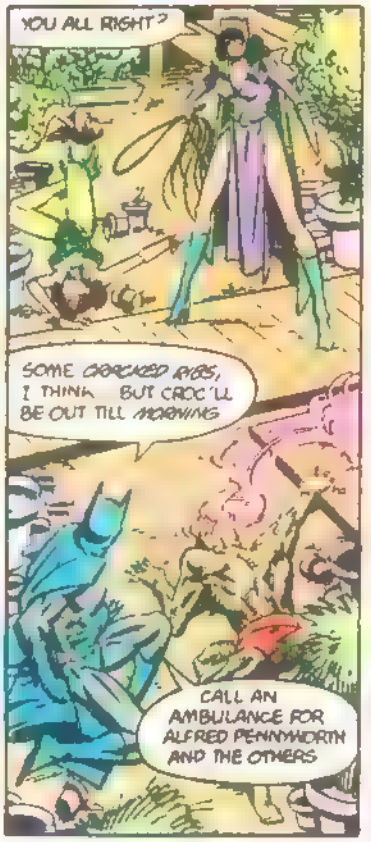

FAST FOOD'S TREATMENT OF VEGETABLES IS CRIMINAL
THAT REMINDS ME OF A RIDDLE WHAT DID THE PICKLE SAY TO THE--
SKTRAK!
NAW! IT'S ABOUT TIME THIS CAPER SOME ACTION-- AND ABOUT TIME YOU AN' ME SQUARED OFF AGAIN, BATMAN..
OUR LAST RUMBLE WOULD'VE ENDED DIFFERENT, YOU KNOW--
--IF NOT FOR THAT KID
SWAP
SOOM!
MY VINE!
POK!
YOU MURDERED "THAT KID'S" PARENTS, CROC!
THWAK!
YEAH AND I LAUGHED, JUST LIKE I'M LAUGHIN NOW.
34


.. 'CAUSE I'M GONNA SNAP YOUR RIBS LIKE DEAD TWIGS.
...AND THEN I'M GONNA BREAK YOUR SPINE!


I SENT ROBIN WITH TALIA SO HE WOULDN'T HAVE TO FACE CROC AGAIN..
.. AND WITH CATWOMAN OCCUPIED, I'VE GOT TO DO THIS MYSELF


GOT TO JUSTIFY JASON'S FAITH IN ME--FIGHT HARDER--USE EVERYTHING IN MY COMMAND TO DEFEAT CROC..

.. EVEN IF IT MEANS RESORTING TO A GAS PELLET FROM MY UTILITY BELT!
WHOOSH!
SNOK


YOU ALL RIGHT?
SOME CRACKED RIBS, I THINK BUT CROC'LL BE OUT TILL MORNING
CALL AN AMBULANCE FOR ALFRED PENNYWORTH AND THE OTHERS

THEN MEET ME IN THAT FIELD BEYOND THE ORCHARDS--IT'S BIG ENOUGH FOR A LANDING
"LANDING"? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO GET SOME BAT-WINGS
SEAGLE-Re

POLICE HEADQUARTERS
I'M TELLING YOU, PENGUIN, MY DEAR-- JOKER DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THE RANSOM FOR GORDON AND HIS COPS! HE'S DEFYING RÄS AL GHÜL'S MASTER PLAN!
AND MAKING US WORK FOR NOTHING, MAD HATTER . SO LET'S LEAVE CAVALIER, DEADSHOT, AND DAGGER TO SECURE THIS FLOOR -
--WHILE WE GO FIND THAT GRINNING JACKANAPE AND REGAIN CONTROL OF THIS CAPER
YOU HEARD ME, BATMAN
THE ENTIRE BUILDING IS CAGED!
WITH INSULATED GLOVES AND GOOD WIRE-CUTTERS, TALIA AND I MIGHT GET THROUGH WITHOUT BEING ELECTROCUTED.. BUT IN THE TIME IT WOULD TAKE, THEY COULD EXECUTE A DOZEN OF THE HOSTAGE COPS.
THEN IT SEEMS YOU TWO WILL JUST HAVE TO HOLD TIGHT UNTIL BATMAN CUTS THE CURRENT FROM [illegible]
AND BY THE WAY, ROBIN, THIS IS CATWOMAN --BATMAN'S BUSY RIGHT NOW ..
".. AND ABOUT TO GET A LOT BUSIER."
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! HE'S PARACHUTING DOWN LIKE A SITTING DUCK!
OKAY, YOU DUMMY, KAMIKAZE TIME!
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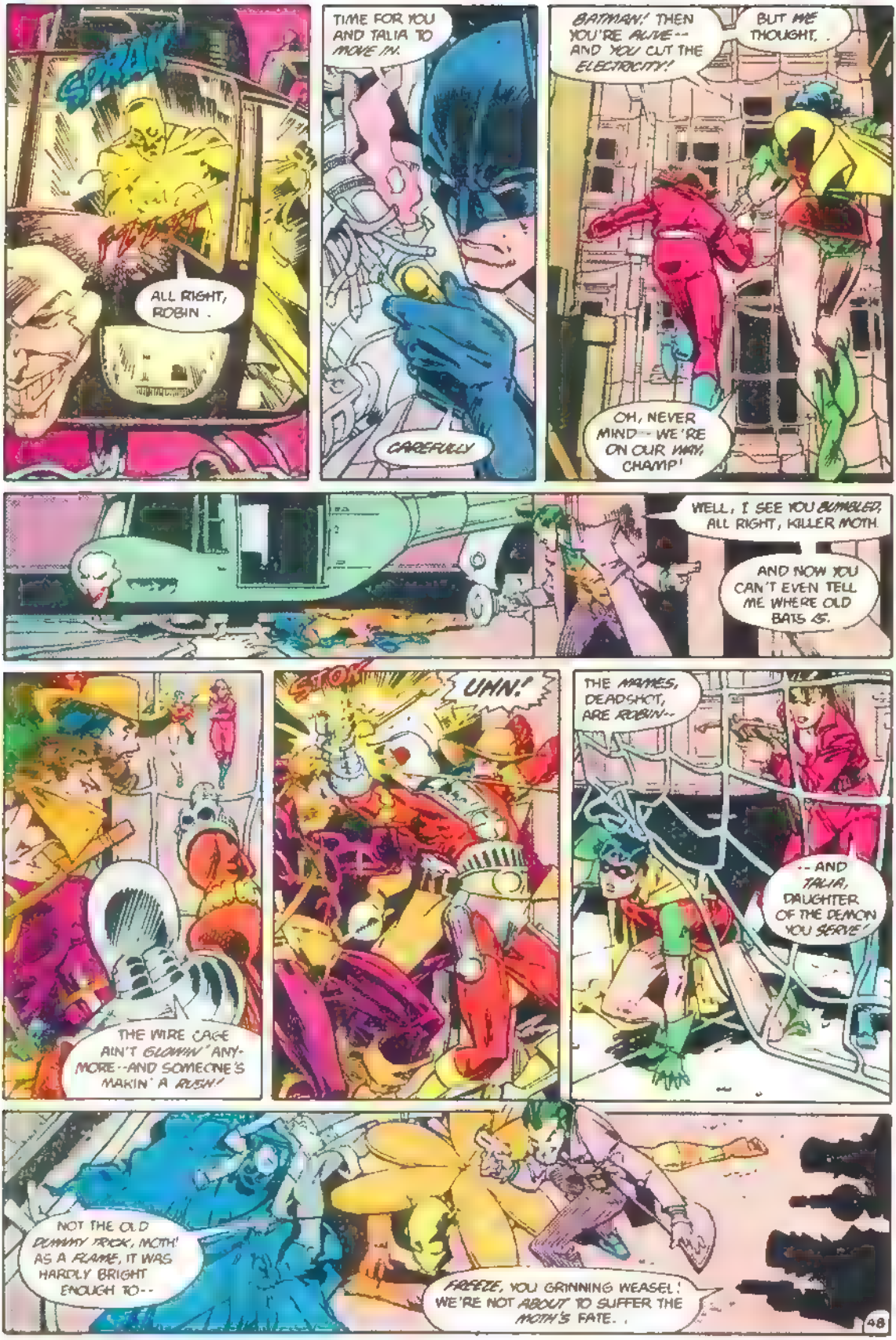
CHAPTER X

THE DARK TRADE

ILLUSTRATED BY: RICK LEONARDI & KARL KESEL

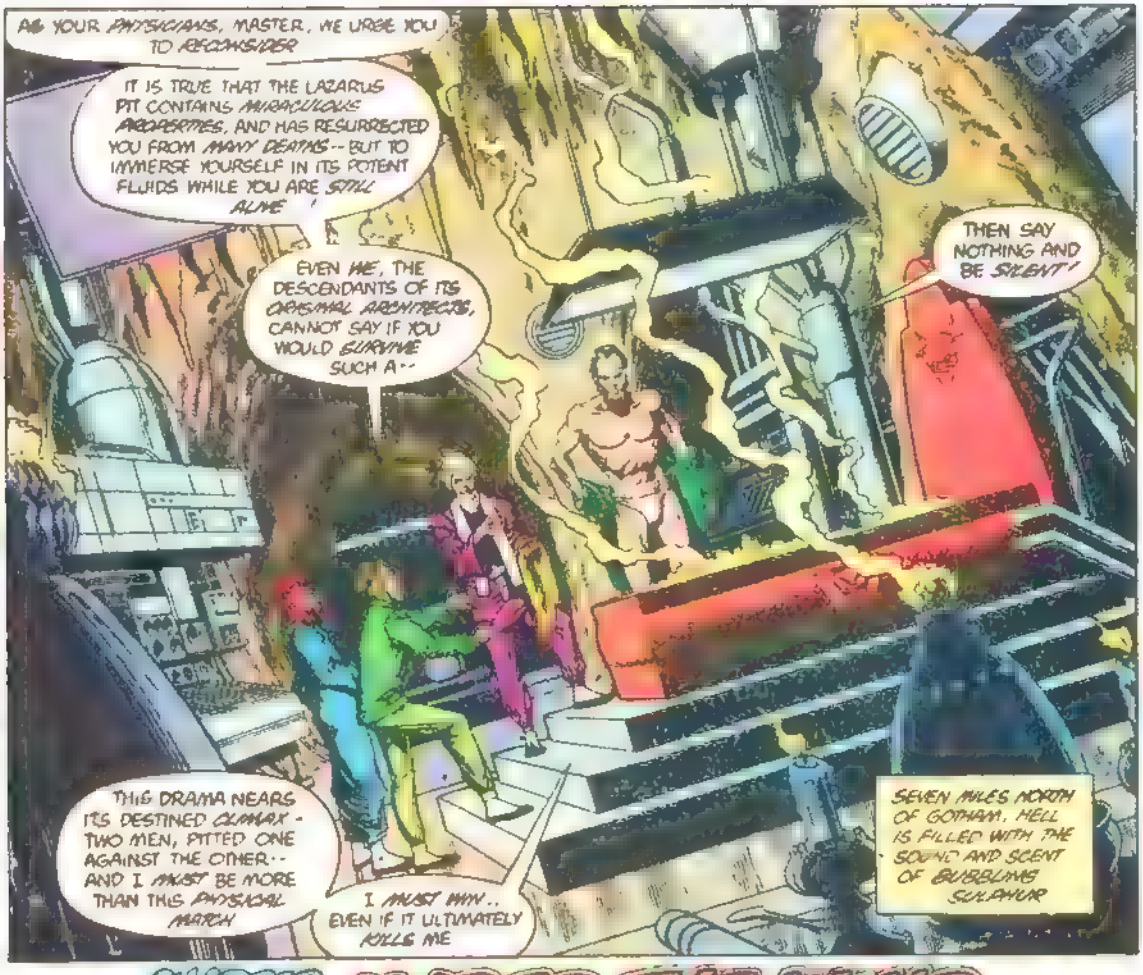
AND TO THINK I ONCE ADMIRED A FOOL LIKE YOU!
A DEAD FOOL LIKE YOU!
PTOW PTOW PTOW
MY GOD TALIA-- HE WAS HIT!
BATMAN'S BEEN SHOT!
S-S-STUFFING?
OH, NO!
JOKER! "IT" IS KILLER MOTH ON THE ROOF!
HURRY, JOKER!!
OH, DRAT.
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, COMMISSIONER GORDON, I DO BELIEVE ONE OF MY BUMBLERS HAS JUST--
"- BUMBLED.
KILLER MOTH HAS JUST FALLEN FACE-DOWN BLACKING HIS CAMERA
AND THE CAMERAS OF THOSE IN THE GREENHOUSE PROVE FAILURE THERE
THEN, AS I KNEW DEEP IN MY HEART THE DETECTIVE MAY BE A MATCH FOR THEM ALL AND WHEN HE IS DONE WITH THE JOKER AND MY OTHER REMAINING SURROGATES -
-- HE WILL COME HERE
THUS, IT MUST BE DONE -- THAT FOR WHICH ALL THE REST WAS MERE PRELUDE.
BUT IT MAY KILL YOU, MASTER! BETTER TO FLEE, TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY!
SUGGEST SO AGAIN AND I WILL KILL YOU! PREPARE IT-- NOW!
47


SPRAK
ALL RIGHT, ROBIN.
TIME FOR YOU AND TALIA TO MOVE IN.
CAREFULLY
BATMAN! THEN YOU'RE ALIVE-- AND YOU CUT THE ELECTRICITY!
BUT ME THOUGHT. .
OH, NEVER MIND-- WE'RE ON OUR WAY, CHAMP!
WELL, I SEE YOU BUMBLED, ALL RIGHT, KILLER MOTH.
AND NOW YOU CAN'T EVEN TELL ME WHERE OLD BATS IS.
THE WIRE CAGE AIN'T GLOWIN' ANY-MORE--AND SOMEONE'S MAKIN' A RUSH!
STOK
UHN!
THE MAMES, DEADSHOT, ARE ROBIN--
--AND TALIA, DAUGHTER OF THE DEMON YOU SERVE!
NOT THE OLD DUMMY TRICK, MOTH! AS A FRAME, IT WAS HARDLY BRIGHT ENOUGH TO--
FREEZE, YOU GRINNING WEASEL! WE'RE NOT ABOUT TO SUFFER THE MOTH'S FATE. .

I DIDN'T ICE HIM, YOU FOOLS! IT WAS BATS-- AND HE'S STILL UP HERE ON THE ROOF SOMEWHERE-- PROBABLY CUT OFF THE POWER TO THE NET-CAGE
...WHICH MEANS YOU CRETINS ABANDONED YOUR POSTS WITH THE BUILDING NO LONGER SECURE!
'T WON'T WORK, JOKER! WE WANT THE TEN MILLION RANSOM FOR GORDON --AND YOU'RE IN OUR WAY.
CHUD
SWAK
I'LL DO THE INTROS, TALIA.
GUN, SWORD, AND KNIVES. MEET CROSSBOW AND FISTS!
VERY WELL, DOLTS IF I'M IN YOUR WAY--
--PERMIT ME TO MOVE!
BRRPT
SUP
HA HA HA
:KOFF: L-LAUGHING GAS!
AHAHA! WHAT A SIGHT-- AND WELL WORTH PUNCHING MYSELF IN THE NOSE!
HEE HEE
YOU'RE AS GOOD AS EVER, JOKER

...AT COMMITTING EVIL
FREEZE, BATS!
WISE UP, JOKER
YOU'D ONLY BLOW AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME MY PARTNER
DO TELL--HMMM! AND WHO'S CRAZY NOW?!
THWK
POK
TOUCHÉ! AND CAVALIER MAKES THREE!
COME ON, TALIA!
WE'VE GOTTA FIND GORDON!
ME HELP YOU? THAT IS RICH, BATS-- AND AGAINST A BRILLIANT FELLOW FIEND LIKE RA'S AL GHUL?
DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT HIS MASTER PLAN IS, JOKER? OR DO YOU REALLY THINK HE FREED YOU OUT OF THE GOODNESS OF HIS HEART?
HE WANTS TO ELIMINATE THE COMPETITION-- SEE YOU ALL DEAD..
...AND THIS ENTIRE SCHEME IS HIS WAY OF DOING IT, WITHOUT EVEN GETTING HIS OWN HANDS DIRTY-- BY TURNING YOU AGAINST EACH OTHER
Y YES... THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT'S HAPPENED. WHICH MEANS--
--RA'S AL GHUL IS PLAYING THE JOKER FOR A FOOL?!
WHAT ELSE?
THE JOKER WENT UP TO THE ROOF, ROBIN!
AND THAT'S WHERE THE BATMAN IS! LET'S GO!

ALL RIGHT, I'LL JOIN YOU, BATS-- BUT ONLY IF I CAN BE THERE TO HELP RA'S TAKE HIS FALL.
IT'S A DEAL, JOKER-- NOW WHERE IS HE?
UH-UH-- I'LL LEAD YOU THERE
YOU KNOW I CAN'T TRUST YOU, JOKER BUT YOU CAN TRUST ME.
YES, YOU AND YOUR SAPPY GOOD GUY CODE --YOU'D NEVER BREAK A DEAL
ALL RIGHT-- HE'S UNDER A WIND-MILL SEVEN MILES NORTH OF GOTHAM
THANKS, JOKER, BUT THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING...
EVEN BREAKING A DEAL
AS EVER, THE MASTER WAS CORRECT-- EVEN THE JOKER HAS FALLEN
AND SO... OUR LORD MUST IMMERSE HIMSELF
WE DID IT, BATMAN-- AND SO DID YOU!
IT'S JUST BEGINNING, ROBIN
THE ARCH-DEMONS HAVE ALL FALLEN BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO FACE THEIR MASTER...
...THE DEVIL HIMSELF.
CATWOMAN-- THE NEAREST LANDING STRIP IS BY THE WHARVES-- PICK US UP THERE.
WE'RE GOING STRAIGHT TO HELL


ALL YOUR PHYSICIANS, MASTER, WE URGE YOU TO RECONSIDER
IT IS TRUE THAT THE LAZARUS PIT CONTAINS MIRACULOUS PROPERTIES, AND HAS RESURRECTED YOU FROM MANY DEATHS -- BUT TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN ITS POTENT FLUIDS WHILE YOU ARE STILL ALIVE !
EVEN ME, THE DESCENDANTS OF ITS ORIGINAL ARCHITECTS, CANNOT SAY IF YOU WOULD SURVIVE SUCH A--
THEN SAY NOTHING AND BE SILENT!
THIS DRAMA NEARS ITS DESTINED CLIMAX - TWO MEN, PITTED ONE AGAINST THE OTHER-- AND I MUST BE MORE THAN THIS PHYSICAL MARCH
I MUST WIN.. EVEN IF IT ULTIMATELY KILLS ME
SEVEN MILES NORTH OF GOTHAM, HELL IS FILLED WITH THE SOUND AND SCENT OF BUBBLING SULFUR

CHAPTER XI UNDER THE WIND

ILLUSTRATED BY: BRYAN BOLLAND

KAVOUMM
LIGHT BEAMING UP!
LET'S GO-- WHILE THEY RE STILL STUNNED BY THE CONCUSSION!
YOU THREE SECURE THIS AREA!
I'M GOING AFTER THEIR MASTER!
CHOK
TWO
ALREADY THEY ATTACK-- FAR SOONER THAN THE MASTER ANTICIPATED!
CHOK
HWAK
AND TALIA-- THE MASTER'S DAUGHTER-- SHE FIGHTS ON THE SIDE OF HIS GREATEST ENEMY!
RA'S AL GHŪL! IT'S TIME FOR THIS HELLISH NIGHT TO END!
WHERE ARE YOU?!
SULPHUR, BUBBLING...
53

..AND THEN..
I AM MERE, DETECTIVE
AND I HAVE BEEN REBORN...
..WITHOUT DYING.
THANKS TO YOU, DEMON, SO HAVE I
PERHAPS SO, DETECTIVE--BUT UNLIKE ME, YOU HAVE BEEN REBORN ONLY IN SPIRIT
AND HARDLY POSSESSING THE MANIACAL STRENGTH OF TEN NORMAL MEN
TRY ME
YOU CAME TO MY CAVERN TO DELIVER YOUR ULTIMATUM--
GRAT
--AND NOW I'VE COME TO YOUR HELLHOLE..
..WITH MY ANSWER
COME AND GET IT!
KRUNSCH
HE DOES--SHATTERING HIS FIST INTO SEVENTY-NINE SPLINTERS OF FREEFLOATING BONE.

AND YET, HIS VERY FLESH NOW IMPREGNATED WITH ACRID SULPHUR, HE MERELY LEERS
I BROKE MY HAND, DETECTIVE.
I FEEL NOTHING
BUT EVEN SO, I FEAR MY PHYSICIANS WERE CORRECT
PREMATURE IMMERSION IN THE PIT IS KILLING ME -- AND THAT I CAN FEEL!
SNORK
THEREFORE WE MUST HURRY, DETECTIVE!
WE MUST DECIDE OUR CONFLICT ONCE AND FOR ALL -- AND DO SO SWIFTLY!
KRAKT
SHUMP
UHN!
BRRR
UMMMMMMM
WHAT THE--?
EARTHQUAKE! THE WINDMILL MUST BE ON A FAULT -- AND THE EXPLOSION TRIGGERED IT!
MANY ARE THE DEATHS I'VE KNOWN, DETECTIVE, BUT ALL WERE NATURAL ONES AND NONE SO EXHILARATING AS THIS..
IT IS A SENSATION I WISH YOU SHARE
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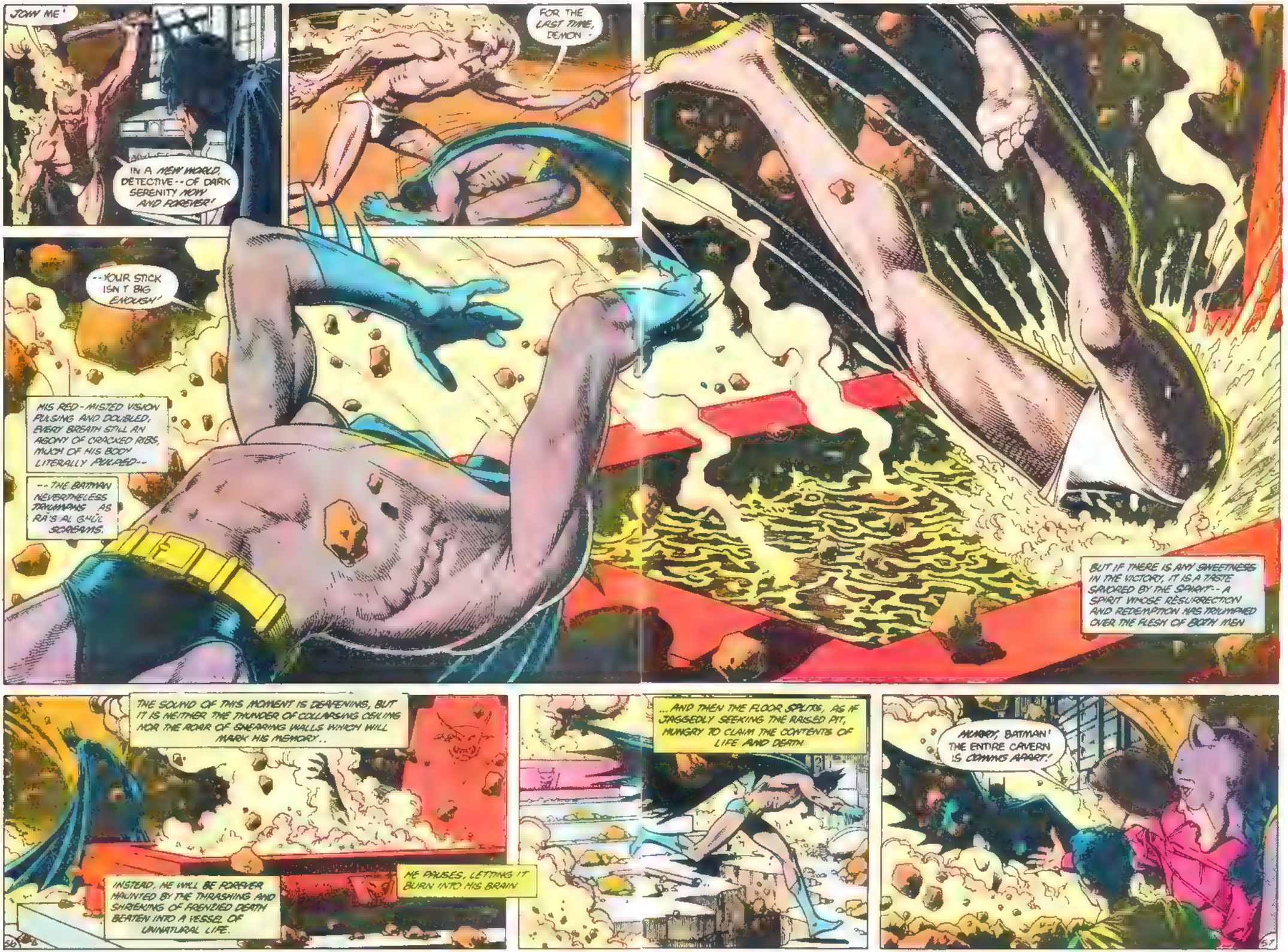
JOHN ME!
IN A NEW WORLD, DETECTIVE--OF DARK SERENITY NOW AND FOREVER!
FOR THE LAST TIME, DEMON.
--YOUR STICK ISN'T BIG ENOUGH!
HIS RED-MISTED VISION PULSING AND DOUBLED, EVERY BREATH STILL AN AGONY OF CRACKED RIBS, MUCH OF HIS BODY LITERALLY PULPED--
--THE BATMAN NEVERTHELESS TRIUMPHS AS RA'S AL GHŪL SCREAMS.
BUT IF THERE IS ANY SWEETNESS IN THE VICTORY, IT IS A TASTE SAVORED BY THE SPIRIT--A SPIRIT WHOSE RESURRECTION AND REDEMPTION HAS TRIUMPHED OVER THE FLESH OF BOTH MEN
THE SOUND OF THIS MOMENT IS DEAFENING, BUT IT IS NEITHER THE THUNDER OF COLLAPSING CEILING NOR THE ROAR OF SHEARING WALLS WHICH WILL MARK HIS MEMORY..
INSTEAD, HE WILL BE FOREVER HAUNTED BY THE THRASHING AND SHRIEKING OF FRENZIED DEATH BEATEN INTO A VESSEL OF UNNATURAL LIFE.
HE PAUSES, LETTING IT BURN INTO HIS BRAIN
...AND THEN THE FLOOR SPLITS, AS IF JAGGEDLY SEEKING THE RAISED PIT, HUNGRY TO CLAIM THE CONTENTS OF LIFE AND DEATH
MURRY, BATMAN! THE ENTIRE CAVERN IS COMING APART!
56
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GOTTA REACH OUR LINES-- CLIMB OUT OF HERE!
THEY GO
.. MERE STEPS AHEAD OF CATACLYSM
RUN!!! IT'S GONNA SWALLOW THE WHOLE WHYOMILL!
FINALLY AND FROM A SAFE DISTANCE THEY WATCH THE LAST OF IT
I .. I'M SORRY, TALIA
DON'T BE, BATMAN
SHE LEAVES -- EVEN AS THE TREMORS SUBSIDE BACK TO HELL BEARING HER FATHER HOME
I'M ALREADY SORRY ENOUGH .. FOR THE WORLD
AND IF IT IS HARDLY THE WORLD RA'S AL GHUL ENVISIONED IT IS CERTAINLY THE ONE HE DESERVES
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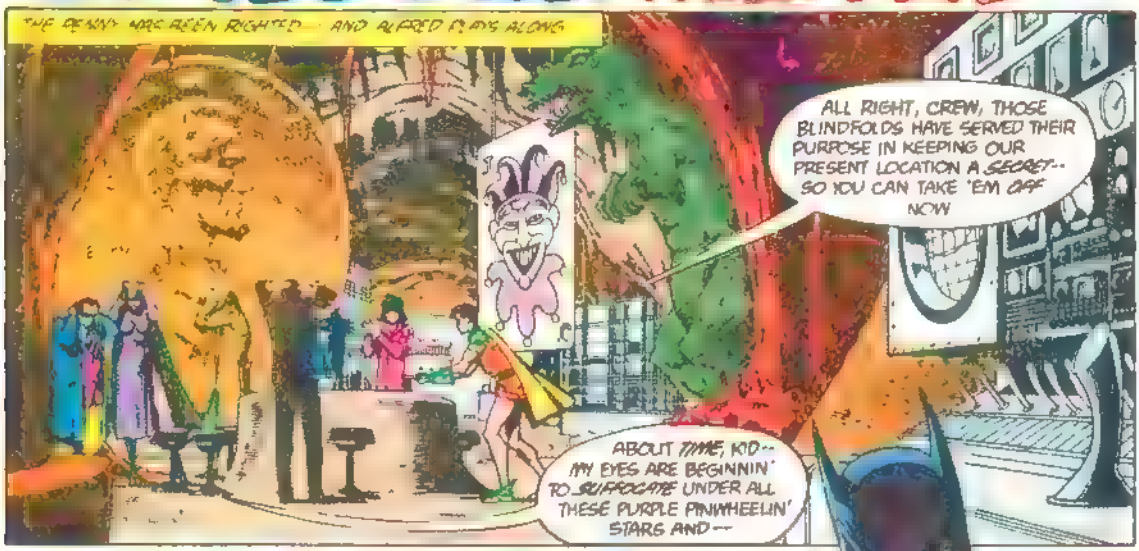
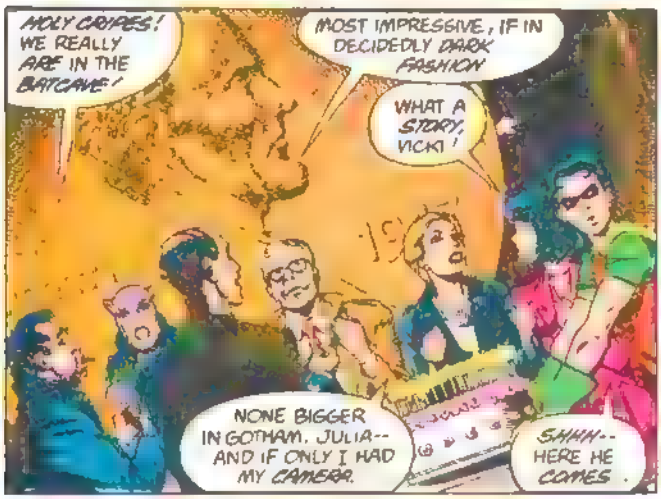
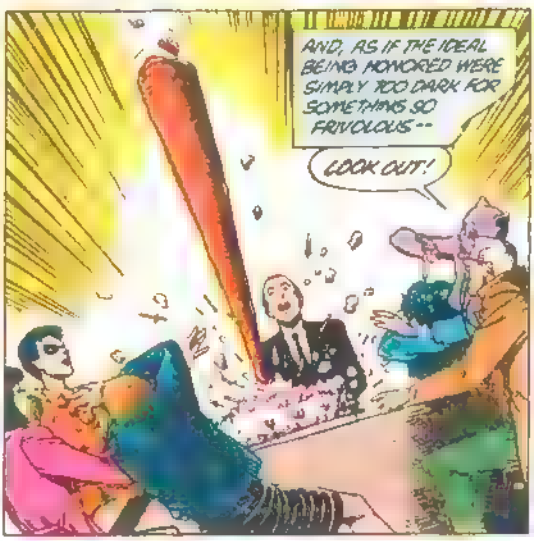
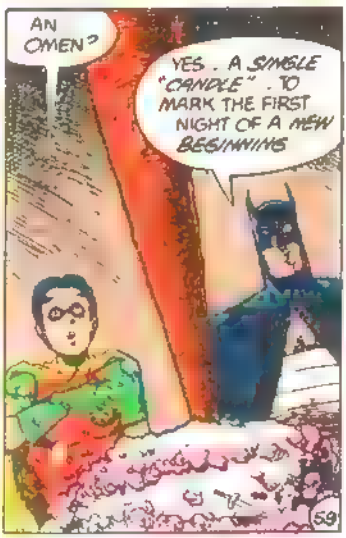
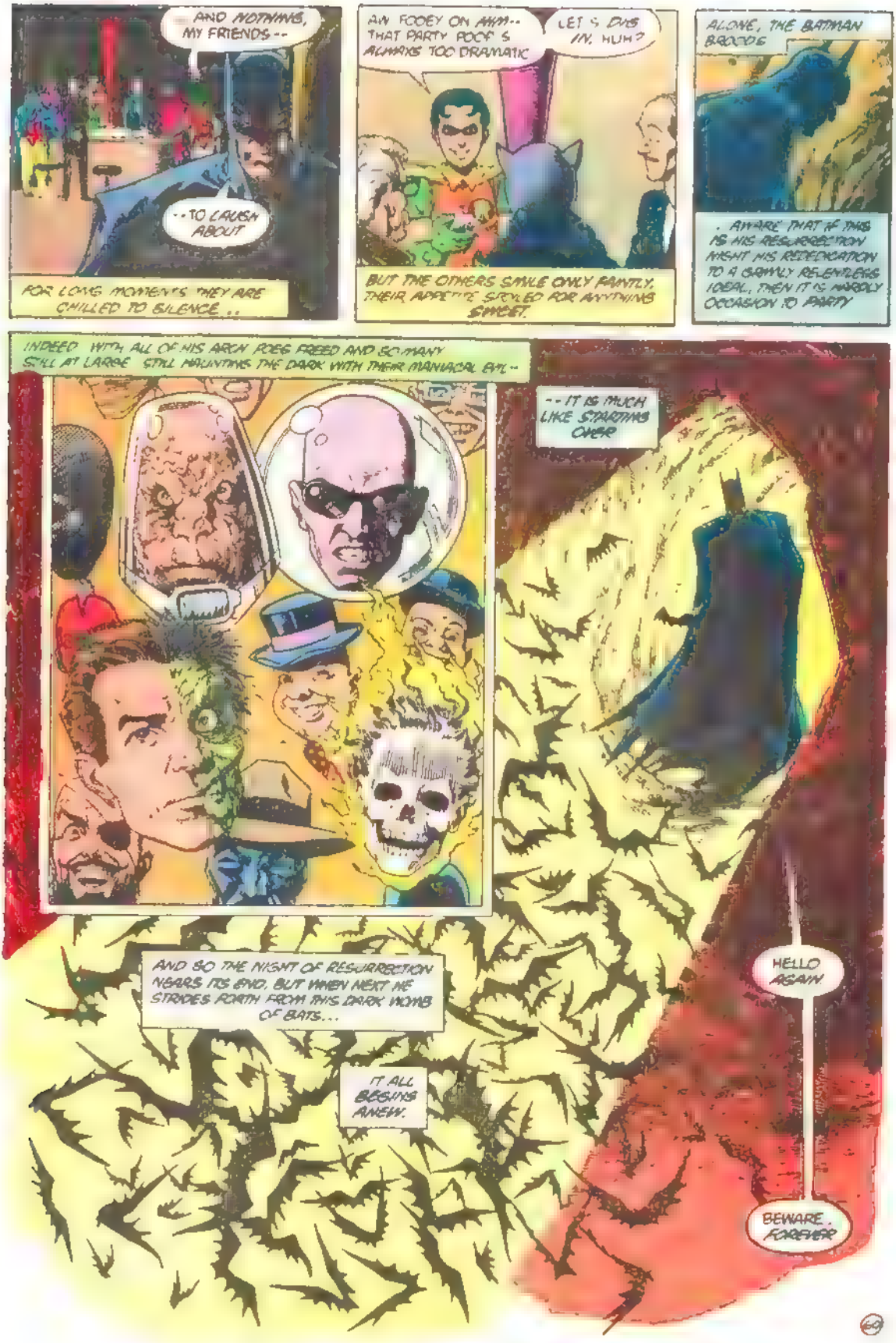
EPILOGUE: FATED FETE


THE DENNY MACREEN RIGHTED... AND ALFRED PLAYS ALONG
ALL RIGHT, CREW, THOSE BLINDFOLDS HAVE SERVED THEIR PURPOSE IN KEEPING OUR PRESENT LOCATION A SECRET-- SO YOU CAN TAKE 'EM OFF NOW
ABOUT TIME, KID-- MY EYES ARE BEGINNIN' TO SUFFOCATE UNDER ALL THESE PURPLE PINWHEELIN' STARS AND--


HOLY CRIPES! WE REALLY ARE IN THE BATCAVE!
MOST IMPRESSIVE, IF IN DECIDEDLY DARK FASHION
WHAT A STORY, VICKI!
NONE BIGGER IN GOTHAM, JULIA-- AND IF ONLY I HAD MY CAMERA.
SHHH-- HERE HE COMES.






AND NOTHING, MY FRIENDS--
--TO CAUSH ABOUT
FOR LONG MOMENTS THEY ARE CHILLED TO SILENCE..
AW FOOEY ON AHM-- THAT PARTY POOP S ALWAYS TOO DRAMATIK
LET S DIS IN, HUH?
BUT THE OTHERS SMILE ONLY FAINTLY, THEIR APPETITE STILL SET FOR ANYTHING SWEET.
ALONE, THE BATMAN BROODS
. AWARE THAT IF THIS IS HIS RESURRECTION MIGHT HIS REDEDICATION TO A GRIMLY RELENTLESS IDEAL, THEN IT IS HARDLY OCCASION TO PARTY
INDEED WITH ALL OF HIS ARCH FOES FREED AND SO MANY STILL AT LARGE STILL HAUNTING THE DARK WITH THEIR MANIACAL EVIL--
--IT IS MUCH LIKE STARTING OVER
AND SO THE NIGHT OF RESURRECTION NEARS ITS END, BUT WHEN NEXT HE STRIDES FORTH FROM HIS DARK WOMB OF BATS...
IT ALL BEGINS ANEW.
HELLO AGAIN
BEWARE. FOREVER

MWALLUTA

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WHY I CHOSE BATMAN

continued from inside front cover

who would keep a little dissolving compound (for those troublesome ropes the crooks of the world keep insisting on binding you with) in one pouch of his utility belt, a high-powered flashlight in another, and some handy fast-acting anesthetic in yet another (Batman was putting people to sleep with tranquilizer darts ten years before they were actually used to sedate irate animals and people)...well, that kind of guy was *my* kind of guy.

Although he eventually got a mag of his own, it was and still is with **Detective Comics** that Batman is most closely associated in my mind. He really *was* a detective; with the deific characteristics and seeming immortality of the super-heroes, those modern Olympians, denied him, he *had* to be a detective. He couldn't rely on super-breath to return Gotham City to its proper place *after* the crime had happened; he had to catch The Riddler or whomever the villain might be *before* he could jump-start those nuclear jets. Like Sherlock Holmes, Batman looked at the tracks the crooks left; he took fingerprints; he picked up hairs from the scene of the crime and took testimony. He kept files—also á là Holmes—on the modus operandi of various criminals. He searched for patterns, knowing—as all the great detectives have—that if a pattern can be found, you can be there waiting for the criminal at his next stop. Batman lived by his wits, dueled and disarmed—sometimes brilliantly—some of the greatest villains ever created, foiled everything from massive jewel heists to dognapping schemes...and managed to live another life at the same time, that of Bruce Wayne, prominent socialite. He raised money, in the sixties he raised his consciousness, and he even raised a ward, Dick Grayson.

Oh...and one other thing. Maybe the real reason that Batman appealed to me more than the other guy.

There was something sinister about him.

That's right. You heard me.

Sinister.

Like The Shadow and the Moon-Man of the pulps, like a vampire (but *not* like a virgin, I never thought that, gang), Batman was a creature of the night.

Oh, yeah, you saw him fighting crime in the day *once in a while*, but mostly he was a shape in the shadows or a grim-faced man-thing crashing through a window at some small hour of the morning, his cape floating around him like a great shadow. In those *Batman-busts-in* panels, you almost always saw a horrid species of fear on the faces of the hoods he was about to flush down the toilet, and I always felt a strong sense of identity with those expressions. *Yeah*, I thought (and still do think), sitting under a tree in our backyard, or maybe in the tub, or on the john (or, as a kid, under the covers with a flashlight). *Yeah, that's right, they* should *look scared*. I'd *sure be scared if something like that busted in on* me. *I'd be scared even if I* wasn't *doing something wrong.*

The night was his time; the shadows were his place; like the bat from which he took his name, he saw with his hands and feet and ears. As Bruce Wayne, he was cheerful, poshy, full of savoir faire and bonhomie, a fellow easily imagined in front of the fire in his book-lined library with a balloon glass of brandy and a bowl of Cheez Doodles near at hand. But when the Bat-Signal floated against one of Gotham's skyscrapers (or perhaps the underside of a handy passing cloud), a grim and unsmiling creature emerged from the Bat-Cave. You could shoot him and he would bleed...you could crank him a good one on the head and he would fold up (at least for a while)...but you could never, *never* stop him.

From the cancellation of the unpleasantly campy *Batman* TV show until 1982 or so, Batman lived in a shadow-world not just as a character but as a published fictional character. There was a time, I don't mind telling you, when I remember scanning the newsstands carefully (and a little anxiously) around the middle of each month, sure that the Caped Crusader would be gone, a character who had simply slipped away into that quiet hall of obscurity where such great creations as J'onn J'onzz, Manhunter from Mars; Plastic Man; The Blackhawks; Captain Marvel; and Turok, Son of Stone had gone before him.

Seems I was wrong to worry.

Seems like you just can't keep a good bat down.

During the last four years or so, one of two things has been happening: either new fans have been interesting themselves in Batman's doings, or some of the old ones have been quietly stealing back. Either way, the blast of publicity and the triumphant sales of DC's **The Dark Knight Returns**, probably the finest piece of comic art ever to be published in a popular edition, seem to have assured Batman's continued success. For me, that is both a great relief and a great pleasure.

I'd like to congratulate the Caped Crusader on his long and valiant history, thank him for the hours of pleasure he has given me, and wish him many more years of heroic crime-busting.

Go get 'em, Big Guy. May your Bat-Signal never fail, your Batmobile never run out of the nuclear pellets it runs on, your utility belt never come up fatally understocked at the wrong moment.

And please, never come busting through *my* skylight in the middle of the night. You'd probably scare me into a brain hemorrhage...and besides, Big Guy, I'm on *your* side.

I always was.

— Stephen King